

The origin of Cuban music

Myths and Facts



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*In memory of my friends
musicologists Alberto Alén and Danilo Orozco.*

A brief introductory statement

When I studied music in Cuba, there was not in our curriculum anything similar to a course related to the Cuban popular music; and we also didn't have plenty of information on this matter at our disposal. For this reason, after the completion of my studies, I still had many questions and great curiosity with regard to it.

Upon establishing my residence in the United States, and therefore acquiring unlimited access to a great volume of information on almost any subject, I began to satisfy the thirst for knowledge that I suffered with respect to Cuban music, and discovered with great surprise many facts that I didn't know and that have also gone unnoticed for the great majority of Cubans.

With the purpose to share this interesting wealth of knowledge, which I considered of great importance to understand the origin and further development of Cuban music, I dedicated myself to write the following essay, which I hope may serve as motivation for future investigators to continue searching about this fascinating subject.

In this project I intended to study the emergence and development of some of the first genres of the autochthonous Cuban popular music, about which I think there still are numerous dark spots in regard to the definition of its characteristics and evolution, as well as other concepts definitely mistaken that have been firmly established in the conscience of the Cuban people by its frequent repetition.

The studied genres belong to a line of development that may be traced from the ancient Spanish song-dances from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, which most probably served as originary prototypes of other posterior Creole genres, such as *punto*, *zapateo* and Cuban *guaracha*, until the emergence of the classical sonority of the Cuban *son* in early 20th century Havana. I have not approached the Cuban *contradanza* because I consider that it has been deeply and thoroughly studied by musicologists such as Alejo Carpentier, Zoila Lapique, Natalio Galán and Peter Manuel, among others.

Through the Creole modification of the above mentioned Spanish song-dances, which showed as a common characteristic its *sesquiáltera* (hemiola) rhythm, a structural element which associate them with the music of Northern as well as Southern Africa, we arrive to different new genres that emerged in Cuba and other regions of the Caribbean and Latin America, which showed particular characteristics that corresponded to a generative pattern or prototype that we have called the *rumba prototype*, due to the ample meaning of this term.

In this essay we explore the following subjects: In the Cuban *punto* and *zapateo* we can already find rhythmic elements of African origin; The Cuban *décima* and *zapateo* do not seem to have come from Canary Islands, as it is commonly believed in Cuba, but from Andalusia; The micrometric displacement of the measure subdivisions and its relationship with the Cuban concept of *sandunga*; The first rhythmic elements from

African origin didn't come from Africa but from Spain; The *Son de la Ma Teodora* is a *sesquiáltera* song-dance and not a "copy of a romance from Extremadura" as it was affirmed by Alejo Carpentier; The binarization of the ternary rhythm song-dances and the new genres of the Latin American music; The Cuban guaracha, a song-dance of new binary rhythm style; Why and how the new style song-dances went from Cuba to Spain; How the African style elements gradually pervaded the European musical generic patterns; The Black Curros and their importance within the process of transculturation that originated the Cuban music; The *rumba prototype* and its derivative: the *Cuban guaracha*; The utilization of the terms *rumba* and *guaracha* with the purpose of denominating the same genre; The *rumbitas campesinas* (peasant rumbitas) that emerged during the second half of the 19th century were a manifestation of the *rumba prototype*, as well as the primeval seed of the *son*; The precursor genres of the *son* or *proto-sones* don't appear just in the eastern region of the island, but throughout the entire country; The *rumba de cajón* is not the "legitimate rumba", as some scholars seem to believe, but just another manifestation of the *rumba prototype*; There is evidence that the contradanzas that were played in Havana, during the second half of the 19th century, showed an early form of the characteristic *montuno* of the *son*; It was in Havana where all the elements of style that constituted the *son* came together.

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Did Punto and zapateo come from Canary Islands or Andalusia?

Everything seems to point out to the fact that Punto and Zapateo were among the first indigenous musical genres of the Cuban nation, because, although the first printed sample of a Creole Zapateo was not published until 1855 in the “Álbum Regio of Vicente Díaz de Comas”,¹ it is possible to find references of its existence since long time before.² Its structural characteristics, which have survived almost unaltered through a period of more than two hundred years, link those musical styles directly with the Spanish songs and dances from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries; therefore, we may consider them our most typically Hispanic genres.

In reference to the origin and development of Punto and Zapateo, the renowned musicologist María Teresa Linares adheres to the opinion of Argeliers León, whom she quotes on his work “*La Música entre Cuba y España*.” She tells us that: “Argeliers León refers to the establishment «throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries /.../ of larger and smaller property owners /.../ in which a ruralization process of Hispanic cultural elements that were first established in elemental urban environments took place» (on those urban nucleus “décimas” were created and the “zapateo” was danced).”³

The Cuban musicologist Rolando Antonio Pérez reaffirms this theory when he states that “...during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries it was manifested in Cuba a tendency to the population of the interior zones and toward the ruralization [sic] of Hispanic characteristics that were before established in the cities...”⁴ What this means is that apparently, the process of evolution of Punto and Zapateo began in the urban areas and expanded afterwards to the rural zones, following the natural population process of the island.

Of course, those urban environments to which Argeliers León and Rolando Pérez refer must have been Havana and Santiago de Cuba, cities on which the commercial activity of the island was concentrated since the 16th century, due to their outstanding participation as important seaports within the “Carrera de Indias”; a previously established itinerary that the Spanish ships followed when transporting goods and gold between the Motherland and America.

The Canary origin (from Canary Islands) of the Punto and Zapateo, a well established belief within the Cuban popular culture, looks at first sight as a fair

¹ Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino: *La música entre Cuba y España*, Fundación Autor 1998, p. 55.

² Linares, María Teresa: *La música campesina cubana. Posible origen*, La Jiribilla, May 31, 2010, Retrieved: August 26, 2010, http://www.lajiribilla.co.cu/2010/n473_05/473_09.html

³ Linares and Núñez, 1998: 54.

⁴ Pérez Fernández, Rolando A.: *La binarización de los ritmos ternarios africanos en América Latina*, Ediciones Casa de Las Américas 1986, p. 68.

assumption due to the significant number of Canary immigrants established in the Cuban countryside, where precisely both indigenous genres of singing and dance were developed. But in spite of the apparent accuracy of this thesis, a more rigorous analysis of the subject shows up certain details that seem to deny it. The simplest argument against it comes from the fact that in the history of the Canary Islands doesn't seem to exist any genre based on the poetical-musical improvisation that may have been taken as an original model for the posterior development of the Cuban Punto.

Between the 16th to the 17th centuries there are mentions of the appearance in the Islands of certain songs such as the "Endechas Canarias", of apparent Hebrew origin, and of others related to typical dances or to different peasant labors such as the "Cantos de Arrieros and those of the "Recolección". None of those songs included improvisation, based on a predetermined poetic meter or in a specific tune, as it appears in the Punto Cubano.

Neither appears improvisation in the traditional genres of the Canary Islands which definitely materialized during the 18th century, before the onset of the Cuban Punto, among which we can mention the Isa, a genre derived from the peninsular Jota, the Folia, slow and expressive song of apparent Portuguese origin, and its most popular and modern variant, the Malagueña.⁵

We only find improvisation in the traditional music of the Canary Islands as a component of the "Ranchos de Animas", a form of ancient popular singing almost disappeared today. The Ranchos de Animas were constituted by groups of lay people who engaged in the collection of alms in order to intercede for the souls of the departed, and made representations during the "Day of all Saints" and Christmas.

The music that accompanies these rites is characterized by a constant and monotonous rhythm marked by instruments like the tambourine, the triangle, the castanets, the drum and the guitar, as well as by percussive sounds produced on the sheet of a sword. The soloist improvises in some occasions, and other times repeats folk songs extracted from the popular tradition, while it alternates with the refrains of the choir. This interpretation constitutes, in accordance with Francisco Suárez Moreno "... an archaic musical expression ... woeful, sad, very expressive ... that transports us to an ancient mystical world from the oriental Mediterranean."⁶ The soloist improvises in "coplas" of octosyllabic poems or in "desechas" of dodecasyllable meter, and structures its singings based on aeolian or mixolydian scales that, in accordance with a consulted source, result

⁵ Siemens Hernández, Lothar: *La música en canarias*, 2ª Ed. Museo Canario, 1977, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, <http://www.gobiernodecanarias.org/educacion/culturacanaria/musica/musica.htm>.

⁶ Suárez Moreno, Francisco: *El culto a la muerte y los ranchos de ánimas en la sociedad tradicional de gran canaria*. Curso: Un patrimonio de muerte. Departamento de patrimonio histórico y cultural del Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 28-30 de octubre de 2009, Retrieved: August 26, 2010, <http://www.infonortedigital.com/publicaciones/docs/117.pdf>, p. 12.

in “... a pitiful and melismatic expression”.⁷ As we can observe, either in its somber and melancholic character as well as in its rhythm, in the metrics of its poems and in the tonal structure of its melodies, the Ranchos de Animas greatly differ from the Cuban Punto [Figure 1].

* - Nota ligeramente descendida

Fig. 1 - Rancho de Ánimas from Valsequillo de Gran Canaria, year 1982.⁸

⁷ Suárez Moreno, 2009: p. 13.

⁸ Rancho de Ánimas de Valsequillo de Gran Canaria, año 1982, Retrieved: August 31, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPQRXXKXfz0g&feature=related>. Transcription by the author.

Although none of the musicologists that we have quoted above identifies a specific region in Spain as a possible place of origin of any generic predecessor of the Punto Cubano, the outstanding commercial activity between Seville and the ports of the New World, points toward a likely Andalusian influence. Precisely, we can find an area in Andalusia where certain forms of poetical-musical improvisation were practiced and are still practiced. This zone includes a wide extension of land that covers the region of La Alpujarra (Granada and Almería), as well as other areas of south-eastern Spain, such as the province of Murcia, the north of the provinces of Granada and Almería and the south of the province of Albacete.⁹

This style of poetical-musical improvisation, called "Trovo Alpujarreño", certainly appears to be in compliance with the necessary requirements to be considered as a possible model for the original Punto Cubano; because it is based on the exchange of individual improvisations on traditional melodic patterns and a prefixed poetic meter, in a very similar way to which it is presented in the Punto.

Apparently, this is a musical genre that comes from the Arabic traditions in the Iberian Peninsula. According to a consulted reference "...in the Arab world, the improvisation is an art firmly rooted in the tradition since the 8th century. The habit of improvising on a previously given verse or 'pie forzado' appears in a multitude of Muslim texts, including the *Thousand and one nights*, even generating a whole system of poetic games based on improvisation. The art of improvised poetry, in the form of duels between two poets, has been sufficiently proven in Al-Ándalus."¹⁰

The trovo may be sung (cantao) or spoken (hablao). In the trovo style "cantao" "... the music establishes the verses and the number of syllables that the "trovaor" has to say... The singing is usually done in a style called "rajao," almost shouting, up to the point that sometimes it is difficult to understand what the troubadour says. Often, the first syllable of the five-line stanza begins with a cry (Ay!) that is not done again when the poem is repeated."¹¹

It is clear, in the above quotation, the extreme similarity with the style of the Cuban "Punto," where the voice of the interpreter is forced some times in the treble tones to the point of seeming a strident moan or lament. This mention is perfectly in line with a reference of Maria Teresa Linares, where she says that "... already in those years [of the nineteenth century] Pichardo considered the crying or "ay-el-ay" as old names of the

⁹ Trovo. Wikipedia, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trovo>.

¹⁰ Del Campo Tejedor, Alberto: *Trovadores de repente*, Centro de Cultura Tradicional Angel Carril, Salamanca, 2006, p. 68 a 78, quoted in Trovo. Wikipedia, Retrieved: August, 25, 2010, <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trovo>

¹¹ R. Fernández Manzano y otros: *El trovo de la Alpujarra*, Ed. Centro de Documentación Musical de Andalucía, 1992, p. 27, quoted in Trovo. Wikipedia, Retrieved: August, 25, 2010, <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trovo>

Punto.” And later she says, quoting Salas Quiroga also in the nineteenth century, that the Punto was “...a continued monotonous cry, beginning with impetuosity and concluding with a cadence that well mimicked the languor and the laziness ...”¹²

The “trovaor alpujarreño” improvises its poems in five-line stanzas called “quintillas.” The “quintilla” is “a strophe of the Castilian metric that consists of five poems of eight syllables (octosyllabic) or less.” It was “often used in the classical theater of the Golden Century, in narrative or lyric parts, or associated with strophes of less verses during the 15th century in the lyric poetry, as well as in groups of two if they were part of major strophes such as the “décima” or “espinela.” As we can appreciate in the previous quote, the “quintilla” can turn also into a “décima, which is the typical strophe of the Cuban Punto.

Perhaps the most solid argument against the hypothesis of the Canary origin of Punto is precisely that in the Canary Islands this genre is called “Cuban Punto”, in clear recognition of its Cuban origin.

According to Maximiano Trapero “the way of singing “décimas” today in the Canary Islands is not just Cuban, it is even Cuban the name that designates it: “Cuban Punto.” And are also Cuban the great majority of the “décimas” that still remain in the traditional memory of the Islands, which speak of Camagüey, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Santiago, Havana, Pinar del Río, as if they were Canaries places. Today, any native of the Canary Islands who sings or have heard singing “décimas,” know by proximity the geography of the Caribbean island, because its toponymy has become fixed within the verses that the emigrants brought from there.”¹³

Regarding the possible Canary origin of the Cuban “Zapateo,” we find a situation very similar to the Punto. The only reference to the “Zapateado” (stomping) in an original dance from Canary Islands is very controversial and it is related to a danceable musical piece called “Canario” or “Canarios”, which appeared in the 16th century. “Canarios” was a vigorous dance which is mentioned for the first time in an Italian manual from 1581. Thoinot Arbeau mentioned it at a later time in his treatise on dance called “Orchesographie”.

In fact, the Canary origin of the piece is not entirely demonstrated. Arbeau describes it as a “ballet that consists of a masked ball where the dancers are disguised like the king and the queen of Mauritania, or like savages with feathers painted in varied colors.” “Canarios” possesses “a “puntillado” (pointed) rhythm that combines the “saltillo” (skip), the “pateo” (kick) and the alternation of “the block and the sole”, and it was already described in the 18th century as a “musical sound of “quatro compases” (four

¹² Linares and Núñez, 1998: 57.

¹³ Trapero, Maximiano: *El libro de la décima. La poesía improvisada en el Mundo Hispánico*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1996, pp. 74 -75.

bars) that is danced producing sounds with their feet with violent and short movements.”¹⁴

As we can see, that description differs greatly from the one of the Cuban “Zapateo.” The “Canarios” dance has been compared to the Argentine “Malambo,” a very energetic and vigorous dance. However, in Andalusia we can find different dance genres that include the “Zapateado.” One of those is the “Fandango”, which coincidentally is the style of dance that accompanies the “Alpujarras trovo” in one of its variants.¹⁵

The “sandunga”

The presence of characteristic elements from African music in Cuban popular music, which was once minimized or entirely denied, has been fully demonstrated since long time ago. Although the features of African music are identifiable in the melody, the rhythm, the timbre, and the form of some Cuban songs and dance pieces, particularly in genres after the appearance of the “son”, the influences that may be perceived in older popular genres such as the Cuban “punto” and “zapateo”, are purely rhythmic.

Before specifying which were the rhythmic elements that differentiated the Cuban, the Caribbean and the Latin-American popular music from the European musical practice, during the first centuries after the conquest of the New Continent, we must first define the basic differences between the utilization of rhythm in the European and the African music.

Since the 16th Century, there begins in Europe the development of a style of vertical harmonization, particularly applied to secular songs and dances, which was contrasting with the horizontality of the voice conduction in the predominantly polyphonic style of the sacred music. This evolution culminates in the 18th Century with the establishment of the style of “basso continuo”, in which the bass part, or the lowest level of the musical texture, becomes the base of a structure that spreads vertically up to the melody, which was usually the higher and most active voice. This vertical effect is produced by the coincidence of the parts of the texture in the stressed beats of the measure, which are accentuated by the bass that serves in turn as a guide to the other voices; as we can appreciate in Figure 2, which shows a fragment of a Spanish dance of

¹⁴ de la Montaña Conchina, Juan Luis. *Folías, zarabandas, gallardas y canarios. Apuntes sobre la danza y el baile en la España del Siglo de Oro*. Retrieved: August 25, 2010, <http://www.filomusica.com/filo5/cdm.html>.

¹⁵ *Trovo*, Wikipedia. Retrieved, August 20, 2014. <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trovo>

unknown origin, very popular since the 16th Century, called Dance of the Axe (danza del hacha).¹⁶



Fig. 2

That kind of structure is comparable to the style of architecture that predominated in Europe since Ancient Greece, where the roof of the building is supported by columns placed at symmetrical intervals.

Differently from the European, the rhythmic style in the musical practice of Africa tends to disrupt the auditory sensation of symmetry by an irregular arrangement of the elements of the musical texture, as well as the non-coincidence of the sounds on the stressed beats of the measure. In this case, the sound that serves as a listening guide to coordinate the coincidence of the voices is not located on the lower level of the texture, but in the highest, and is usually performed by one or more percussive instruments of membrane, metal or wood, as the Cuban “claves”, the cowbell and some drums. Under these leading sounds, which repeat a static rhythmic formula, develop a group of parts whose rhythms tend not to match with the stressed beats of the voices that carry the repetitive pattern, thus creating a true rhythmic counterpoint. The auditory result is of great flexibility and ease in contrast with the rhythmic rigidity of the European style. Something that translated into architectural terms may resemble certain flexible and sinuous modern constructions that seem to be suspended in space.

Usually, this effect of dislocation of the rhythmic symmetry is accomplished in the African music through some techniques. The most important of those techniques is the “syncopation”, which involves the systematic displacement or interruption of the sounds in such a way that the attacks of the notes do not match the stressed beats of the

¹⁶ Savall, Jordi y La Capella Reial de Catalunya: *Villancicos y Danzas Criollas*, CD, track 2. Transcription by the author.

measures. This one is followed by another practice, much more subtle but perhaps more significant in terms of the overall auditory effect, which consists of the micrometric displacement (called *micro time*) of the subdivisions of the measures and the beats of the measures. This technique produces an impression of pleasant rhythmic inaccuracy, a kind of sensual undulation which has been called in Cuba "playing with flavor or *sandunga*", and may even cause a voluptuous feeling in those who perceive it.

A characteristic effect of this micrometric displacement is the one produced by the coordinated performance of African drums, as can be seen in the Yoruba or Abakuá religious rituals. In these cases, if we pay careful attention, we can perceive how the ability to determine if the meter we hear is of a binary or a ternary subdivision becomes difficult at times. In general, we could consider that sometimes the parts tend to a binary subdivision, while in others they tend to a ternary. Another very simple example is related to the interpretation of two popular genres which possess a wide influence from African music, the Cuban Danza and Jazz. Everyone knows that none of these genres should be interpreted as they are notated, but instead their execution implies a special rhythmic license, which is precisely what gives them their most essential stylistic character, that subtle "sandunga" which we already spoke about.

In the following example, taken from the book "Africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba", from Fernando Ortiz,¹⁷ we can observe all the characteristics previously mentioned [Figure 3]. While the treble voices execute stable rhythmic patterns, which also consistently highlight the stressed beats of the measure, the lower voices perform constant rhythms with much more mobility. It is also evident the frequent utilization of syncopation as well as the juxtaposition of binary and ternary rhythmic patterns.

¹⁷ Ortiz, 1965: 429.

The musical score is divided into two systems, each containing six staves. The instruments and parts are labeled on the left of each staff.

System 1:

- Ekón:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Features triplets of eighth notes.
- Erikundí e Itones:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Features triplets of eighth notes.
- Binkomé:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Features eighth notes and rests.
- Kuchí Yeremá:** Bass clef, 2/4 time. Features eighth notes and rests.
- Obiapá:** Bass clef, 2/4 time. Features eighth notes and rests.
- Bonkó Enchemiyá:** Bass clef, 2/4 time. Features eighth notes and rests.

System 2:

- 1:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Features triplets of eighth notes.
- 2:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Features triplets of eighth notes.
- 3:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. Features eighth notes and rests.
- 4:** Bass clef, 2/4 time. Features eighth notes and rests.
- 5:** Bass clef, 2/4 time. Features eighth notes and rests.
- 6:** Bass clef, 2/4 time. Features eighth notes and rests.

The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, eighth notes, and rests, indicating a complex rhythmic structure.

Fig. 3

From the Indies to Seville

Certain innovative pieces were danced in Spain between the 16th to the 18th centuries, which were considered native to the American continent and received picturesque names such as Sarabande, Chaconne, zambapalo, retambico and gurumbé. Of those, one of the most well known was the Chaconne, about which Lope De Vega said: "from the Indies to Seville has come by post" and at the same time he pointed out its sensual and somewhat insolent character, since in order to dance it, a woman should often lift the skirt of her dress showing her petticoat.

Already in the eighteenth century, we find this type of dances in the compilation of works by guitarist Santiago de Murcia (1673-1739) called *Codice Saldivar No. 4*. Some of those, such as the Jácaras, the Jota and the Cumbé, even though carrying different names also possessed a common feature, its rhythm.

That sensual rhythm, whose popularity came to spread throughout Europe, is generally known as "hemiola", and in Spain it was called "Sesquiáltera". It could be technically described as the alternation or overlapping of sound groups of binary and ternary accent and equal length, or more specifically, as the consecutive or simultaneous performance of a measure in 6/8 and another in 3/4, or vice versa. As in the following example [Figure 4]:



Fig. 4

The following example of a Chaconne, called "A la vida bona", from the Spanish composer Juan Arañés (circa 1600-1650),¹⁸ shows the two characteristic features of African music mentioned above, a very syncopated melody over a sesquiáltera rhythm [Figure 5].

¹⁸ Savall, op.cit.: track 1. Transcripción del autor.

Soprano
Un sa rao de la cha co na se hi zoel mes de las ro sas hu bo

Contralto
Un sa rao de la cha co na se hi zoel mes de las ro sas hu bo

Tenor
Un sa rao de la cha co na se hi zoel mes de las ro sas hu bo

Bajo
Un sa rao de la cha co na se hi zoel mes de las ro sas hu bo

8

Fig. 5

In the sesquiáltera we can observe one of the essential characteristics of African rhythm, that is to say, the sensation of ambiguity induced by the alternation or juxtaposition of binary or ternary rhythmic patterns within the same musical piece.

The African sesquiáltera

It has been proven that the sesquiáltera appears frequently in the music of the African continent, both in the Southern and in the Arabic Northern, so, despite the apparent Hispanic origin of the above mentioned dances, it is possible that the practice of the sesquiáltera rhythm may have arrived in Spain directly from the African continent, probably through the Maghreb. As we know, the Islamic culture exerted a powerful influence in a great extension of the Spanish territory from the 8th to the 15th century.

The following example [figure 6] is a dumbek drum rhythm used in the musical-literary style called Muwashah, which is related to the Andalusian-Arabic traditions of the Moorish Spain. Its name is samaa`ii darj, and it shows a clear hemiolic tendency.¹⁹

Fig. 6

¹⁹ *Jas's middle eastern rhythms list*, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, <http://www.khafif.com/rhy/rhylist.html>

Following we present to you another rhythm with sesquiáltera characteristics [Figure 7], called qudaam. This one belongs to an Andalusian – Arabic style called Nubaat.²⁰

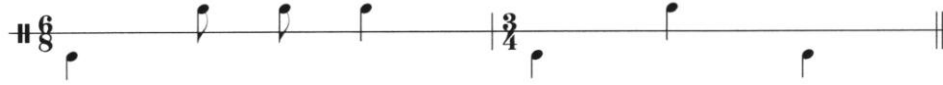




Fig. 9

In the “Cantigas de Santa María,” famous collection of medieval songs compiled by the King Alfonso X (called The Sage) during the 13th Century, we already find a rhythmic structure that suggests the sesquiáltera rhythm. Following, a fragment of the Cantiga No. 166 (Como poden per sas culpas) [Figure 10].²³



Fig. 10

The consideration of previous examples leads us to think that what in fact happened in America was a reunion of the African, brought to the continent as slaves, with a rhythmic pattern that was already familiar to them, which they gladly adopted and elaborated.²⁴

In reference to the influence of the sesquiáltera on the Cuban popular music, both the “zapateo” and the “punto” show this African pattern as their rhythmic base, as we can appreciate in the following samples. The first one is a version of a Cuban “zapateo” that was published in the Álbum Regio, from Vicente Díaz de Comas [Figure 11].²⁵

²³ Transcription by the author based on several sources.

²⁴ Pérez Fernández, Rolando A., 1986: 16.

²⁵ Linares and Núñez, 1998: 55.



Fig. 11

The second one is a transcription of the characteristic “clave” rhythm that accompanies the Cuban “punto” singer, taken from a contemporary recording [Figure 12]. In both examples we can appreciate a hemiolic rhythmic pattern.

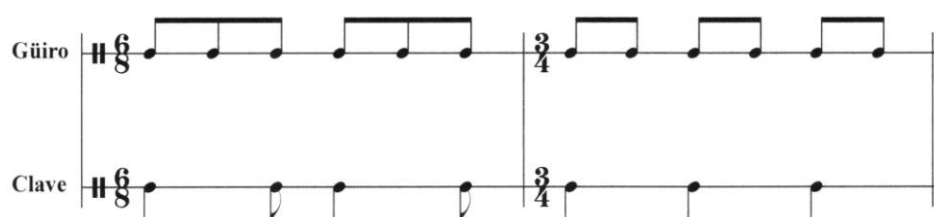


Fig. 12

Even in the “Son of Má Teodora,” as it shows in the transcription included by Alejo Carpentier in his book: “The music in Cuba”, we find the sesquiáltera as a rhythmic base, what gives us an idea of its widespread utilization in the songs and dances that were played in Cuba during the centuries posterior to the conquest, until the appearance of the first samples of published music in the 19th Century [Figure 13].



Fig. 13

Taking in consideration what have been previously exposed, we can conclude that already in the Cuban “punto” and “zapateo” we find elements which are typical of the music from the African continent. Those African-Arabic features were already fully integrated into the Spanish musical tradition when they arrived to the island in the songs and dances that came from the Metropolis and other countries of Spanish America. Those Hispanic-African elements of style, combined with others from an evident African origin, served at a later time to the settlers of Cuba as the basic material for the creation of new indigenous musical genres, like the “guaracha” and the “contradanza”.

The mystery of Má Teodora

Around the year 1946, the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier publishes the first treatise on the history of Cuban music. In this book, called “The Music in Cuba”, Carpentier mentions some information that has been quoted extensively by other authors. That information referred to the existence in the 16th century of a small musical group established in the city of Santiago de Cuba. The group, which supposedly played during holidays and liturgical celebrations, was composed by two fifiers, a Sevillian “violon” player and two free Dominican black women from Santiago de los Caballeros, the sisters Micaela and Teodora Ginés. After reporting a series of facts related to the adventures of the Ginés sisters, Carpentier ends up affirming, without disclosing any information about his sources, that one of Teodora's songs has been preserved until preset time, and also that “this is the only composition that can give us an idea about how was the Cuban popular music in the 16th Century: the famous *Son of Má Teodora*.”²⁶

At first glance, the possibility that these testimonies may have been preserved during such a long time certainly arouses great interest, since they offer us valuable information about how the popular music from the beginning of the Cuban nation may have sounded like. But unfortunately, this optimistic expectation disappears after a deeper analysis of the mentioned reference's original sources.

Apparently, Carpentier borrowed this data about the Ginés sisters from a book published in 1893 by the composer Laureano Fuentes Matons, titled *Las Artes en Santiago de Cuba. Apuntes históricos*. In turn, Laureano Fuentes based his story on a text by Hernando de la Parra from the second half of the 16th century, which was quoted by Joaquín José García in his book from 1845 *Protocolo de antigüedades, literatura, agricultura, industria y comercio, etc.* Some musicians, active in Havana at that time, were mentioned in that text which is transcribed below:

"The dances and amusements in Havana are fun and extravagant, they preserve the roughness and low cultural level of the indigenous people, and [illegible] the scarcity and almost inexistent resources of a population that begins to grow. There are [illegible]

²⁶ - Carpentier, 1979: 36

four musicians that participate in activities where they are [illegible] following a previous agreement. They are Pedro Almanza from Málaga, violin; Jácome Viceira, from Lisbon, clarinet; P de Ochoa, from Sevilla, violon; Micaela Ginez free black (horra), from Santiago de los Caballeros, "vigüelista" (vihuela); they usually carry their accompaniment to scrap de "calabazo" and rattle the "castañuelas" (castanets). These musicians are always occupied and to (contract them) [illegible] it is necessary to bid up their payment, which is usually exorbitant, provide them with transportation and wine, as well as food, which they usually take home as a tip from their presentations. These same musicians participate in solemn ceremonies at the parish as those for San Cristóbal, San Marcial, Corpus.....²⁷

This text, supposedly from Hernando de la Parra is also quoted by Antonio Bachiller y Morales in his book *Apuntes para la historia de las letras, y de la instrucción pública de la Isla de Cuba*, where he states:

"Hernando de la Parra, referring to the years between 1598 to 1562, states that the dances and amusement activities in Havana were *fun and extravagant* and preserved the *roughness and low cultural level* of the indigenous people. To the same author we owe the memory of the name and type of individuals of the only orchestra from that time... They were Almanza, from Málaga, Viceiro from Lisbon, Ochoa from Sevilla and Micaela Ginez, free black from Santo Domingo. A violin, a clarinet, a vihuela, pampered and paid for to obtain the preference from those who requested their services. Protocolo de Ant. t. l.º p. 297."²⁸

It is important to point out that in those texts we can't find any mention to Teodora Ginés, Micaela's sister, which supposedly settled in Santiago de Cuba, or to the *son* (musical genre) that bears her name.

Apart from these references, it doesn't seem to exist any other than the one that appears in the "Crónicas de Santiago de Cuba", a work from Emilio Bacardía Moreau published in 1894 and quoted by Fernando Ortiz in his book *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba*.²⁹

It seems obvious that due to the great temporal distance between the written reference and the historical fact, it is virtually impossible to give any credibility to the data exposed by Carpentier. According to María Argelia Vizcaino in her article "Our first music", "some musicologists claim that these arguments are not a proof, if we take into account that (this melody) was transcribed four hundred years after that event..." María

²⁷ García, Joaquín José: *Protocolo de antigüedades, literatura, agricultura, industria y comercio, etc.* Habana, Imprenta de A. Soler, Calle de La Muralla No. 82, 1845, p. 297.

²⁸ Bachiller y Morales, Antonio: *Apuntes para la historia de las letras, y de la instrucción pública de la Isla de Cuba*, Tomo II, Imprenta del Tiempo, Calle de Cuba No. 37, Habana, Cuba, 1860, p. 45.

²⁹ Ortiz, Fernando, 1965: 321

Argelia Vizcaino also states in his essay that Odilio Urfé wrote in 1959, in the journal of the Central University of Las Villas, that “is quite impossible to accept Má Teodora as an example of Cuban music from the 16th, 17th or 18th Centuries, taking into account that the transcription [was made] in the 19th Century.”³⁰

The musicologist and musical producer Tomás García points out that –“there is no evidence; there hasn’t been even a single proof of the existence of these two sisters. A succession of confusions and of unsupported sources has generated this situation. Micaela and Teodora Ginés are literature, not music history” To sustain its refutation of this topic, García refers to the statements of another musical investigator, Alberto Mugercia, who according to him, affirms in his work “Teodora Ginés: myth or historical reality?” that the sisters Ginés never existed.³¹

After discarding the validity of the Son of Má Teodora as an acceptable example of Cuban music from the 16th Century, we believe that it is still possible to use the well-known tune as a speculative exercise that may help us to form to an idea about certain musical styles that were interpreted by the population of Cuba between the 16th and the 18th centuries.

There might be a relatively satisfactory response, although imprecise, to this question, because it is logical to think that the music that was heard in Cuba in a particular historic period of time must have been similar, within flexible temporal parameters, to the music that was heard during the same period in other parts of the world related to the socio-economic and cultural development of the island, as well as in Europe and particularly in Spain and other countries of Hispanic America.

Although we consider impossible to determine the historical antiquity of Má Teodora (considering the existing documentation), we also think that we can reasonably admit the possibility that this song should have been truly an authentic popular melody in vogue between the end of the 18th Century and the beginning of the 19th, or perhaps previously, and that as Laureano Fuentes affirms in his historical notes, he had heard it in the first third of the 19th Century during his infancy in the city of Santiago de Cuba.³²

As for the structure of the song, Carpentier points out that the Son of Má Teodora is only “a copy of a romance from Extremadura”, basing this inference mainly on the octosyllabic quatrains that compose its text. According to Carpentier, “The text faithfully follows the classical octosyllabic structure of the romance, so well studied by Vicente

³⁰ - Vizcaino, María Argelia: *Nuestra primera música*. <http://mariargeliavizcaino.com/m-musica.html>.

³¹ - Tertulia Caribeña. ¿Donde está la Má Teodora?
http://www.centroleon.org.do/esp/n_noticias.asp?index=72&ALL=0&month=5&year=2004

³² <http://www.lajiribilla.cu/pdf/sones.pdf#search=%22La%20proximidad%20del%20octogesimo%20cumpl>
[eanos%22](#). Pag.2

Mendoza, with its accentuation in the syllables 1, 3, 5, and 7.” and he keeps on explaining that “As for The rhythm of the phrases that function as “coplas” (verses) (“Dónde está la Má Teodora”... “Con su palo y su bandola”, etc.), [Má Teodora] adheres faithfully to one of the Hispanic patterns, established by the same Vicente Mendoza, on determining the origins of the Mexican *corrido*.”

With this last assertion Carpentier closely approaches to unveiling the mystery which holds the rhythmic and formal structure of the Má Teodora, since it is very likely that this song may be truly related to the old Spanish song-dances that originated, at a later time, the Mexican *corrido*. What the author doesn't go so far as to enunciate is that the peculiar rhythmic pattern of this melody represented in the historical notes of Laureano Fuentes, is the same as the one that is found in many Spanish song-dances from the 16th to the 18th Centuries, among which we find the popular "Chaconne" which is mentioned in literary works by well-known authors of the Spanish Golden Century.

This peculiar rhythm called "sesquiáltera" in Spain, and more generally "hemiola" (defined as the consecutive or simultaneous utilization of a rhythmic pattern of binary accentuation and another of ternary accent), constitutes the identification or hidden key that, once revealed, shows us the song-dance nature of the Má Teodora. This is possibly one of the many song-dances that were played in Cuba between the 17th and the 18th centuries and its characteristics perfectly match those of the Spanish Chaconne, as well as those of so many other related song-dances.

As for the relationship of Má Teodora with the Extremaduran romance, we must consider that the lyrical-rhapsodic (cantabile) character of the romance is in open contradiction with the danceable intention of the song-dances that comprise the family of the Chaconne. In addition, the argument in favor of the similarity of the octosyllabic quatrains of the Má Teodora with those of the romance fades away while we observe that also the text of one of the best-known Chaconnes that has been preserved until the present time, the famous "Un Sarao de la Chacona" from Juan Arañés (1600-1650), shows the same octosyllabic structure as the Má Teodora.

We may add to all the previous facts that the responsorial character (copla-estribillo) of the text of Má Teodora denotes a greater similarity with the style of the Chacona of Arañés than with the style of the Extremaduran romances, as we can confirm in the following transcription of its text:

Un sarao de la chacona
se hizo el mes de las rosas,
huvo millares de cosas
y la fama lo pregoná

Refrain:

A la vida vidita bona

vida, vámonos a chacona

In the romances we do not frequently find a refrain, as in the well-known romance of “La Delgadina”, which Carpentier precisely mentions as an example:

Este era un rey con tres hijas
 Más hermosas que la plata
 A la más rechiquitita
 Delgadina le llamaban

I think we could grant a place to Má Teodora within the history of Cuban music as a possible representative of those melodies that were sung and danced since the discovery (of America), until the appearance of the first printed scores in the island; those songs and dances that we may never be able to know or listen to anymore.

The first genres of Cuban music

Within the universal history of music there are dark areas about which we do not possess almost any information. Until the invention of the phonograph, which made possible the mechanical recording of sound, it was impossible to have an absolute certainty about how the music sounded like in certain periods of antiquity, even if we had a decipherable code for the representation of the sound parameters that would allow us to reproduce them at a later time. In cases in which there was not a decipherable code available for the musical notation, we only depended on iconography, some verbal descriptions and certain fossil musical genres which have been preserved with minimal variations over long periods of time.

This is the situation of Cuban popular music before the appearance, during the 19th century, of the first printed musical scores in Cuba, because from the discovery of the island in 1492 until the beginning of the 19th century, any written or printed samples of music were preserved.

The first genres of the Cuban popular autochthonous music, the *punto*, the *contradanza* and the *guaracha*, appeared in an unknown date of the 19th century; and it is not possible to determine a chronology for those events due to the fact that they emerged approximately during the same period of time. Those genres developed in a parallel fashion, frequently interacting, but we should mention that the *punto* and the dance style that accompanied it, the *zapateo*, are the ones that show a greater similarity with the Spanish sesquiáltera music that may have been sung and danced in Cuba during the 16th to the 18th centuries.

Possibly, the most important characteristic that may suggest a relationship between the new genres and the ancient danceable Spanish songs is precisely its

sesquiáltera rhythm, as it is evidenced in the following example quoted by Rolando Pérez Fernández [Figure 14], where a melody from an ancient Spanish *romance* is compared with the transcription of a famous *tonada* (tune) of Cuban *punto* called *guacanayara*.³³



Fig. 14

The earliest known mention to Cuban *punto* comes from Esteban Pichardo in his *Diccionario provincial casi razonado de voces y frases cubanas*, published in 1836, which refers to the vocal part of this musical style as *ay* or *ey*, and to the accompaniment with the guitar, the harp or the tiple as *punto* or *punto de harpa*. This text also points out the competitive character of those improvised chants and its loud stentorian performance, described as "almost shouting".

The *ay* or *punto* that has been preserved until our time by the tradition utilizes as a basic pattern the *décima* poetic meter, popularized during the 17th century by the Spanish priest, writer and musician Vicente Espinel. Pichardo states that the *zapateo*, the counterpart of *punto*, was a rustic dance that was very popular at that time.³⁴

Near the end of the 18th century, the chronicler Buenaventura Pascual Ferrer mentions a dance called *contradanza* that according to him was danced in Cuba in the style of the French School, similarly to the way it was danced in Spain.³⁵

According to Cuban musicologist Zoila Lapiuque, Havana enthusiastically embraced the *contradanza* that was already a fashion in Spain since the middle of the 18th century; and from there it spread to other places of the Island such as Santiago de Cuba.³⁶

The European *contradanza* style was modified by Cuban musicians, who were in their great majority blacks or mulattos that had been in contact with the African culture

³³ Pérez Fernández, Rolando A: *La binarización de los ritmos ternarios africanos en América Latina*, Ediciones Casa de Las Américas, 1986, p. 71.

³⁴ Hernández Jaramillo, José Miguel: *De jarabes, puntos, zapateos y guajiras*. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Ciudad de México, Junio 2017, p. 112.

³⁵ Lapiuque, Zoila: *Aportes franco-haitianos a la contradanza cubana: Mitos y realidades*, en: Giro, Radamés: *Panorama de la música popular cubana*, Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1998, p. 138.

³⁶ Lapiuque, Zoila, 1998:143

Fig. 16 - Contradanza *Las dos amigas*.

But in the Cuban *contradanza* we can perceive an important innovation in comparison with the ancient sesquiáltera dances, because its rhythm appears also in a binary form, maybe due to the preexistence of this type of meter in the European *contradanza* that initially served as a prototype for the Creole *contradanza*.

The *vertical hemiola* that served as a basic rhythmic pattern for the *punto*, the *zapateo* and the ternary meter *contradanza*, was transformed by the Cuban musicians in a binary rhythmic structure that was called *rhythm of habanera or tango*, as it is shown in the following example [Figure 17]:



Fig. 17 – Binarization of the vertical hemiola.

In the following *contradanza* titled *San Pascual Bailón*, from 1813, we can observe the binary version of the vertical hemiola, the *rhythm of habanera or tango* [Figure 18]:



Fig. 18 - Contradanza *San Pascual Bailón*.

Similarly to the *punto* and *zapateo*, the Cuban *guaracha* was in its origin a *folkloric* product, to which any generic denomination was assigned.

As early as 1801, Buenaventura Pascual Ferrer published a note in a newspaper called *El Regañón de La Habana*, in which he referred to certain songs that “run out there in the mouth of the common people”.⁴⁰ He also mentioned that in Havana, the black and

⁴⁰ Linares, María Teresa: *La guaracha cubana. Imagen del humor criollo*. Consultado: Abril 6, 2010, <http://www.musica.cult.cu/documentos/guaracha.htm>

mulatto families sung and danced some happy and lively tunes, accompanied by guitars, *tiples* and *güiros*.⁴¹

Those songs, that by the second half of the 19th century began to be called *guarachas*, were always an expression of the most genuine popular humor. The satirical *guarachas* reflected the daily events like the city tabloids and the neighborhood gossip gatherings, and it was not until the 1860s that the *guaracha* was mentioned by its name within the activities of the newborn *Cuban Bufo Theater*.

At the beginning, similarly to the *contradanza*, the *guaracha* alternated binary and ternary meters, not only in different pieces, but also within the same piece; and the characteristic rhythm that in great measure determined its identity was the sesquiáltera, as in the *punto*, the *zapateo* and the *contradanza*. Following we can notice in a *guaracha* from the 19th century titled *Aguanta hasta que te mueras*, by composer José Tamayo, how it alternates a ternary 6/8 meter with a binary 2/4. We can also observe a sesquiáltera rhythmic pattern in the accompaniment of the first section, while in the second section the composer utilized the binary *rhythm of habanera or tango*, characteristic of the Cuban *contradanza*. [Figure 19].

Fig. 19 - *Guaracha - Aguanta hasta que te mueras*.

⁴¹ Lapique, Zoila, 2007: 57

Binarization of the ternary rhythms

The Spanish song–dances of sesquiáltera rhythm, adopted and enriched with syncopations by the African-Hispanic Creole in America since the 16th century, suffered a gradual transformation between the 17th and 18th centuries, giving place to new genres that began to be performed in a two by four meter, that is to say, a binary beat with a binary subdivision, instead of the traditional six by eight, which is a binary beat with a ternary subdivision.

It seems that the binary meter and the syncopated rhythmic patterns that identify the Cuban *guaracha*, arise as a result of the process of transformation that the characteristic ternary rhythms of the Ibero-American sesquiáltera song-dances underwent. This process, called *binarization*, took place in those areas of South America and the Caribbean that received a greater number of African slaves between the 17th and 18th centuries, an area called the *Atlantic black stripe*,⁴² which covers the Major Antilles, parts of Mexico and Central America, as well as a portion of terrain that extends from north of the South American territory through the east toward Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, and from the west to Perú.

We can point out, as a possible factor of change, a trend within the African music to make more flexible the rhythmic performance by discretionally fluctuating between binary or ternary values through the micrometric displacement of the subdivisions of a meter, with the purpose of creating a rhythmic elasticity effect. The oscillation between the binary subdivisions and the ternary, which tended to lean towards the ternary meter in the ancient sesquiáltera song-dances, begins to drift gradually to the binary meter during the 18th century, until it is fixed on it towards the end of the 19th century.

In the following example [Figure 16] we can appreciate the quantity of micrometric change needed to perceive a rhythmic cell as binary or ternary. In this case, it has been assigned to every time unit (no matter if it is a quarter note or a dotted quarter note) the duration of a second (with a metronomic indication of quarter note = 60), and every second has been split in turn into twelve equal parts, so it would be possible to distribute them in binary or ternary units of equal duration.

⁴² Pérez Fernández, 1986: 15.

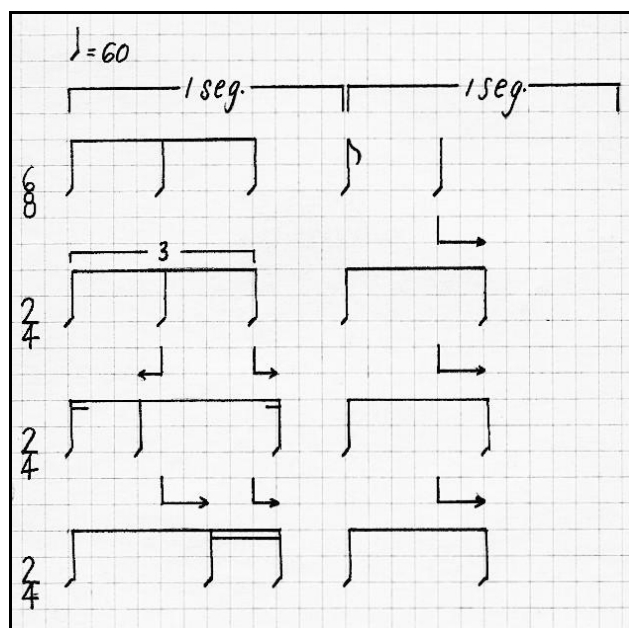


Fig. 16

This analysis reveals that the difference between the two rhythmic patterns, binary and ternary, is minimal (only one or two twelfths of a second, depending on the kind of variation of the rhythmic cell). In that gradual and almost imperceptible way, the ternary-binary cells of the sesquiáltera song-dances were transformed with the passage of time in binary-ternary cells.

According to Rolando Antonio Pérez, it is possible that the *binarization* process would have been originated by an intrinsic tendency of the African to transform the ternary rhythms in the melody into binary rhythms, which mainly manifests when he is immersed in a cultural environment that is not his original one. Or in other words, when the chants he sings do not belong to his musical tradition, as in the case of the African slave inserted in the Hispanic-American cultural context. According to Pérez, the trend towards the binary subdivision is more intense and decisive in the areas with most African influence in Ibero-America, while in other areas with less influence, the sesquiáltera rhythm prevails.⁴³

The existence of a noticeable relation between the ancient ternary forms and the new binary forms has been indicated also by Rolando Pérez, who says that: "The ternary rhythmic patterns adopted new forms, but they preserved original characteristics that make possible its identification and the tracing of its evolutionary trajectory".⁴⁴

For example, if we compare some structural elements of a Mexican "guaracha" from the 17th Century, with other fragments of more recent Hispanic-American song-

⁴³ Pérez Fernández, 1986: 16.

⁴⁴ Pérez Fernández. 1986: 15.

dances, we can appreciate the transition process from the ternary rhythmic cells to the binary ones [Figure 17].

1 En - la - gua - ra - cha - ¡Ay! - - - - Le - fes - ti - ne - mos - ¡Ay!

2 Ca - bó - co - da - te - rra - pre - ta - pena - bran - ca - vem - sa - ra - rá

3 Qui - ta - te - de - laa - ce - ra - que - mi - ra - que - te - tum - bo

4 La - mu - la - ta - Ce - les - ti - na leha co gi do mie doal mar

5

* Tansición de las células rítmicas ternarias a binarias

Fig. 17

In the series of examples presented previously, the first one corresponds to a Mexican “guaracha” that has been preserved thanks to the fact that its composer, Juan García de Céspedes (1619-1678), included it on a Christmas Carol called “Inviting is the night” (Convidando está la noche).⁴⁵ On it, the author specifically defines the character of the piece by designating that section with the name of “guaracha.” In addition, the text of the song also mentions the genre of the piece. According to its characteristics, this is a song-dance in six by eight, similar to the Sarabande and the Chaconne.

En la gua - ra - cha ay le fes - ti - ne - mos ay
To - quen y bay - len por - que te - ne - mos ay
Pe - ro el chi - co - te a un mis - mo tiem - po ay
Paz a los hom - bres dan de los de - los ay

The second example, a folk melody from Brazil,⁴⁶ belongs to a periodo of transition where we still find the first rhythmic cell of the principal motive in its ternary form, while the second one has been already “binarized.” In the third example, quoted from the “Quitate de la acera,” a popular “conga” from Havana, we are confronted with the same previous case, the combination of a ternary cell with a binary one.

⁴⁵ García de Céspedes, Juan: *Convidando está la noche*, Score, Version from The Boston Camerata y Joel Cohen. Ars Música, 1997.

⁴⁶ Pérez Fernández, 1986: 86.

In the last two examples that belong to “La Guabina”, we observe how the first rhythmic cell of the motive has been already “binarized”, and it appears in two different forms, [one eighth note-two sixteenth notes] or [one sixteenth note-one eighth note- one sixteenth note].

Perhaps one of the best examples of binarization is that of the “son jarocho” of Veracruz, Mexico. While most of those “sones” are executed in the traditional rhythmic meter of 6/8, some of them, such as *La Bamba*, *El Tilingolingo* and *El Colás*, are binarized variants performed on a 2/4 beat. In the following transcriptions [Figure 18], taken from the accompaniment of two “sones jarochos” interpreted by a typical group comprised of harp and “jarana,” we can appreciate the difference between the binary and ternary rhythmic patterns. The first transcript belongs to a ternary “son” called *La Iguana*, and the second corresponds to the well-known *La Bamba*.⁴⁷

The figure contains two musical transcriptions, labeled 1 and 2. Each transcription consists of two staves: the top staff is for the harp (Arpa) and the bottom staff is for the jarana.
 Transcription 1 (La Iguana) is in 6/8 time. The harp part is marked with '8va' and shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The jarana part is marked with 'rasgueo' and shows a complex, fast-paced rhythmic pattern.
 Transcription 2 (La Bamba) is in 2/4 time. The harp part shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The jarana part is marked with 'rasgueo' and shows a complex, fast-paced rhythmic pattern.

Fig. 18

The Cuban “guaracha” can be also taken as an excellent example of binarization. If we consider that a Mexican “guaracha” existed since the 17th century, and that it should have been transferred to Havana through the interaction from the “Carrera de

⁴⁷ Grupo Chucumite. *La Bamba*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-w7pyoq6tNM&feature=related>. *La Iguana*, Retrieved: September 2, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ccxj0O11Js&feature=related>, Retrieved: September 2, 2010. Transcriptions from the author.

Indias”; it would not be too audacious to conclude that the Cuban “guaracha,” which was documented during the 19th century, is nothing more than a modified Mexican “guaracha,” or rather, a binarized “guaracha.”

According to Ned Sublette, who quotes in turn Argeliers León, “Fernando Ortiz believed that the name “guaracha” came from the word *guarache* (or *huarache*), the [typical] sandal of the Mexican Indian, and that this song-dance could have come to Cuba from Mexico, possibly after having passed through Spain. Linked from long ago to the guitar, or to several members of the family of the guitar, as the *bandurria*, the “guaracha” must have been sung in Cuba as soon as in the seventeenth century.”⁴⁸

We know from testimonies, as the following one from Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes in his article “Influence of African rhythms in our song tradition”⁴⁹ (where he shows as an example a binary and a also a ternary “guaracha”), that binary as well as ternary “guarachas” were formerly composed in Cuba, and that sometimes they even showed a combination of both rhythms, as also happened with the Cuban Contradanza. Sánchez de Fuentes also states in his book called *The folk-lor [sic] in Cuban music* that: “The most remarkable *musicógrafos* [sic] agree that the *Guaracha* was a Spanish dance that existed in Spain [sic] and that, transfigured and transformed by the influence of time and the law of evolution that everything reaches, it still lingers in America and Naples.” Sánchez de Fuentes also says in reference to the metric of the “guaracha” as follows: “hundreds of them were sung through the streets of old Havana and popularized in the Island, almost always written in binary meter or in six by eight, because they were hardly ever written in three by four.”⁵⁰

In reference to this matter, we must mention a commentary of Emilio Grenet, in the article entitled *Cuban music Guidelines for its knowledge and study*, where he mentions the Spanish origin of the “guaracha”: “The name guaracha commonly refers to a Spanish dance that was certainly introduced in Cuba, where it went through a process of adaptation that ended up by submitting it to our rhythms”. Grenet also refers in that article to the intermediate stage in the process of binarization of the “guaracha,” in which the coincidence within the same piece of both a binary and a ternary meter was the general rule and not the exception. Grenet tells us in his article that “... We have always consider the Guaracha, which we met in its last stage, as a an exposure of rhythmic combinations (6/8 or 3/4 with 2/4) in a non-established order... the 2/4 of the bolero is followed by a 6/8 of the “clave”, or vice versa, just to finish in the typical refrain of a

⁴⁸ Sublette, Ned: *Cuba and its music* Chicago Review Press, Inc., 2004. P. 238.

⁴⁹ Sánchez de Fuentes, Eduardo: *Influencia de los ritmos africanos en nuestro cancionero*. Clave. Publicación del Instituto Cubano de la Música. Año 12. No. 1, 2010.

⁵⁰ Sánchez de Fuentes, Eduardo: *El folk-lor en la música cubana*. La Habana, Imprenta “El siglo XX”, Teniente Rey 27, 1923. P. 91, Retrieved: 6 de May, 2013.
<http://dloc.com/UF00073996/00001/1j?search=cuba>

rumba... That's why we find it difficult to accept the Guarachas written with a single meter in the beat."⁵¹

The new genres

The Cuban “guaracha belongs to a group of song-dances of binary rhythm that appear between the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, in the Caribbean and South America. This new genres include the *cumbia* in the northern coast of Colombia, the binary variants of the *son Jarocho* in Veracruz, the *choro*, the *maxixe* and the *samba* in Brazil, the *milonga* in Argentina and the *merengue* in the Dominican Republic.

Those genres share numerous characteristics, such as their condition of song-dances, the fusion of European and African elements in its formal and stylistic components, its festive and sensual character, as well as the binary meter and certain essential rhythmic structures.

In the following example [Figure 19] we mention some of those basic rhythmic structures, comparing in each case the original ternary rhythm with its binary counterpart. The first rhythmic cell is usually executed by the guitar or some of its Spanish-American derivatives, such as the *jarana jarocho* or the Brazilian *cavaquinho*, as well as by the Cuban *maracas* or the *bongo*. The second is usually interpreted by some idiophones such as the *güiro*, the *cencerro* (cow bell) or the *maracas*. The third rhythmic pattern corresponds to the bass part rhythm, first as it appears in the *son Jarocho*, and subsequently in some variations that are present in forms already “binarized,” as in the first example, that shows the so called Cuban “tresillo” as it may be appreciated in the “guaracha” called *El Sungambelo*, published in Havana in 1813.⁵² The second one is the well-known rhythmic patten called “Habanera or Tango”, and the third one is found in the bass part of “The Guabina” as well as in binary *sones Jarocho*s such as “La Bamba” and “El Colás.”

⁵¹ Grenet, Emilio: *Música cubana. Orientaciones para su conocimiento y estudio*. Publicado en: Giro Radamés: *Panorama de la música popular cubana*, Editorial Letras Cubanas, Habana, Cuba, 1998, P. 87.

⁵² Carpentier, 1979: 123.

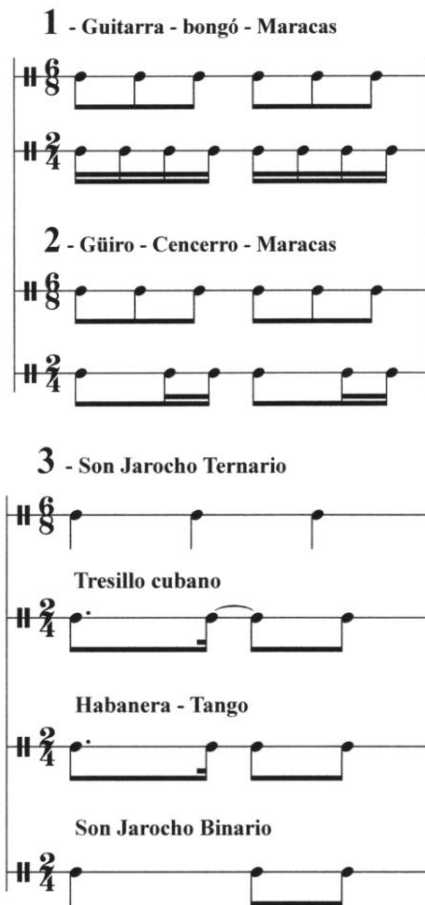


Fig. 19

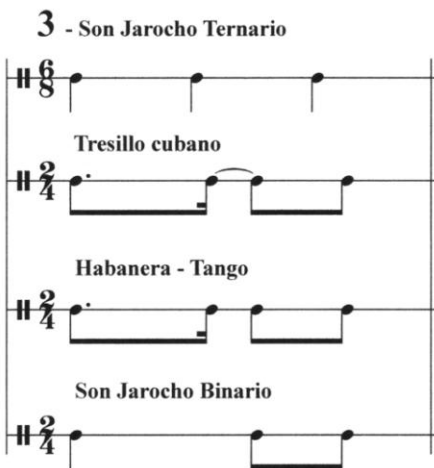


Fig. 20

The appearance of these new genres in the area covered by the so-called "Black strip of the Atlantic" is no coincidence, since in addition to the prominent presence of Africans in this area; it coincides with the preset route which the Spanish ships followed, from the 16th to the 18th centuries, in their commercial interaction with the Americas. This route, called "Carrera de Indias", led to a strong communication and exchange between different cities in the Caribbean and South America, as Havana, Cartagena de Indias, Veracruz, Portobelo, San Juan, Lima, Montevideo and Buenos Aires, during a long period of time.

Since the sixteenth century, with the purpose to protect themselves against possible attacks by pirates and privateers, the Spanish crown established a fleet system for all their vessels carrying goods, gold and silver between Spain and America [Figure 21]. In accordance with that system, the Spanish ships travelled in two fleets that departed from Seville in February of each year. After stopping over in Canary Islands, they continued its journey toward the American Continent and were separated when passing through the island Dominica. From that point, the fleet of New Spain was headed toward Puerto Rico, where it stock up on water and firewood in order to continue its

journey up to the port of Santiago de Cuba, from where, after a brief stay, it departed toward their final destination, the port of San Juan de Ulúa in Veracruz, Mexico.⁵³

In the meanwhile, the other fleet called of the “Galeones,” was sailing up to Cartagena de Indias in Colombia, where it disembarked part of its load. Later, this fleet sailed toward Portobelo in Panama, which was the communication point across the isthmus with the “Armada de la Mar del Sur,” which transported the goods to the Southern Spanish territories which belonged to the “Virreinato del Perú.”

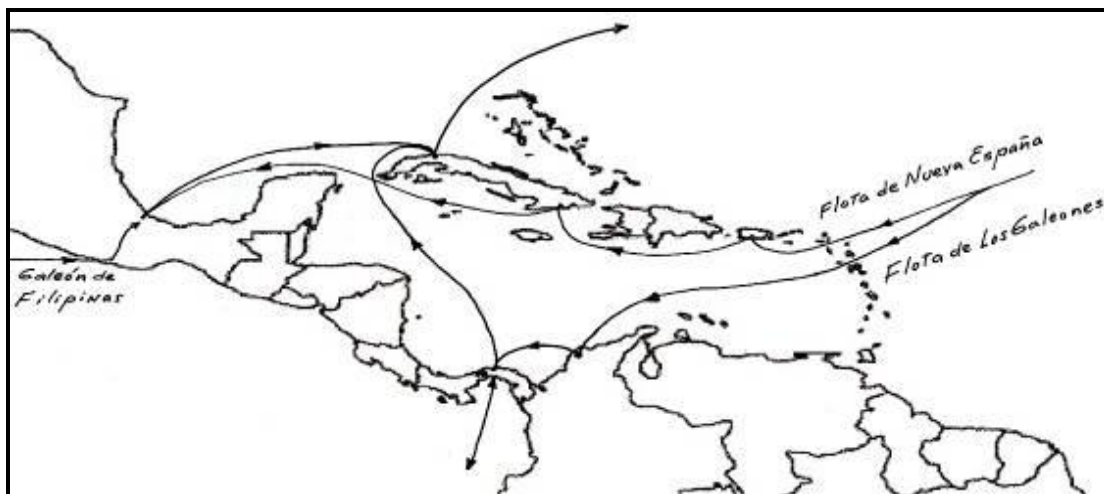


Fig. 21

Once all the goods and merchandise to be transported back were received, the two fleets met again in Havana, where they stayed from two to three months before departing again toward Spain.⁵⁴ This is the reason why the port of Havana was considered as “The key to the new world and the safeguard of the Occidental Indies” (Llave del Nuevo Mundo y Antemural de las Indias Occidentales), as it shows on a royal edict from 1634.⁵⁵

The key to the New World

⁵³ Comité internacional de itinerarios culturales, *Ficha de identificación de un itinerario cultural*. Retrieved: August 25, 2010, http://www.icomos-ciic.org/ciic/pamplona/tamarablanes_ficha.doc

⁵⁴ Lucena Salmoral, Manuel: *Organización y defensa de la Carrera de Indias*, Edición original: 2003, Edición en la biblioteca virtual: November, 2005, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/historia/lucena/orgca/indice.htm>.

⁵⁵ Sorhegui, Arturo: *La trascendencia de la legislación en la evolución del puerto de la habana (1520 – 1880)*, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, http://www.estudiosatlanticos.com/aehe_files/Arturo_Sorhegui.pdf.

Of course, the cities of Havana and Santiago de Cuba greatly benefited from the commercial trade and from their status as providers of goods and services for the Spanish fleets. Particularly Havana, in its privileged condition as “Key of the New World”, grew and transformed taking as a basis the zones related to the port and the shipyard, where many vessels of the highest quality were built for the Spanish “Armada” since the 16th century.

Alongside the benefits related to the system of fleets, established in 1561, other advantages also arrived for Havana, such as the construction of several defensive fortresses and a shipyard, the establishment of a copper foundry, financing for the island from Mexico, the subordination of other territories, like Florida, to its hierarchy, the ability to send ships to Mexico and the Canary Islands for the purpose of ensuring the necessary supplies for the fleets, as well as the proliferation in the Bay of a series of piers that allowed the transfer between its two banks and easy access by land from the South, East and West, which facilitated a level of essential communication for the development of the city.

The long stay of the fleets consisting of more than a thousand people in the Havana port, led to the creation of an important infrastructure dedicated to their service. We can say that the social-economic life of the city developed at the pace that was set by the activity of the fleets. The population of Havana should provide lodging, supplies for the duration of the stay, the construction and fairing of the ships, protection against possible attacks, as well as comfort and entertainment for the sailors and soldiers.⁵⁶

Fernando Ortiz refers to this latter aspect in its work: *La clave xilofónica de la música cubana*, where he says that “Havana was, as any very frequented marine post has always been, famous for its entertainment and indulgence, to which the foreigners and seamen, along with the noisy slaves and low-life women dedicated themselves in their long stays; in the inns of the black “mondongueras,” and in the dens or planks set by generals and admirals for the gambling mob; and in those still less saintly places that were enclosed in huts (bohíos) and *casas de embarrado*, inside the walls and out of them, by *El Manglar*, *Los Sitios* and *Carragua* ... singing, dancing and music came and went from Andalusia, from America and from Africa, and Havana was the center where they all were melting with great heat and more polychrome iridescences.”⁵⁷

Havana was truly the center in which converged, not only the commercial transactions, but also the songs, dances, fashions and styles that coming from Spain where mixed with Indian and African elements in cities such as Cartagena de Indias and Veracruz. After a while, they returned back to Spain from Havana through the ports of Seville and Cadiz, already transformed into new artistic genres. Havana’s society constituted the fertile ground where the songs and dances featuring a new style of Latin American music were generated, and from where they spread at a later time.

⁵⁶ Sorhegui. *La trascendencia de la legislación en la evolución del puerto de la habana (1520 – 1880)*.

⁵⁷ Carpentier, 1979: 48.

Encounter of cultures

Although the racial mix of blacks and whites began in Cuba with the arrival to the Island of the first African slave women, about 1550,⁵⁸ their cultures stayed relatively independent one from the other for a long time, mainly because the slaves didn't have access to the culture of their masters, and the Spanish masters perceived the African culture as primitive and barbarian, unworthy of any serious consideration.

Still during the nineteenth century, the following description of a feast of slaves, included in a story by the Catalan Francisco Baralt, reveals a very negative image of the cultural manifestations from the African people. According to Baralt: "These [African] dances have such a strange appearance, because of the place, the time, and the characters that execute them, that even to the same people that observe them every day, they produce a feeling very difficult to express: we don't know whether it is curiosity or disgust, if their wild and primitive character, that attracts or repels, seem to put between those parties and the meetings and feasts of civilized men the distance that exists between the universal deluge and the time that we have now reached."⁵⁹ It was necessary to wait for the formation of a social layer composed by free blacks, called "horros," and by mixed "mestizos" (half breed) originated by the union of the Spanish with the African black woman, so that those two cultures would interact and fuse.

Since very early in the history of Cuba, this emerging sector composed of free mulattos and blacks began to take care of the chores that the upper classes disdained. Among those occupations were multiple trades and handicraft work, as well as the arts in general.

Jimenez mentions in an article that "The social layer formed by free blacks and mulattos grew with the course of time, and already in the seventeenth century, it constituted an intermediate sub-world between the whites and blacks slaves; to the first ones they were brought closer by their condition of free men, and to the second ones, by their color... Many documents and testimonies of the eighteenth century are aimed in the direction of the consolidation of a sector of free blacks and mulattoes as an important segment of the colonial society. In the cities, their presence in the trades and manual work tends to be dominant, while in the rural universe they cultivated the land in small "sitierías" or exploited labor estates ("haciendas"), some "estancias" (farms) and even some "trapiches" (sugar cane plantations)..." The priest Varela wrote [in the nineteenth century] about this issue as follows:

⁵⁸ Fernández Escobio, Fernando: *Raíces de la nacionalidad cubana*, Miami, Florida, 1992, p. 227.

⁵⁹ Baralt, Francisco: *Escenas campestres. Baile de los negros. Costumbristas cubanos del siglo XIX*, Selección, prólogo, cronología y bibliografía Salvador Bueno, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/costumbristas-cubanos-del-siglo-xix--2/html/fef805c0-82b1-11df-acc7-002185ce6064_7.htm

"The free men of color (...) are almost all dedicated to the arts, mechanical as well as liberal, so we may say that for each white artist there are twenty of color. Those have an instruction that perhaps may not be expected, since most of them know how to read, write and count, and also a profession that some have mastered with quite perfection; although they are not able to match the foreign artists, for not having other ways to instruct themselves than their own talent."⁶⁰

The musician "of color" was the agent by which means the process of cultural fusion (or *transculturation*) of the Hispanic and African music in Cuba was carried out, since he was exposed to the influence of both cultures. Accustomed, from the cradle, to the tendencies and rhythmic complexities of the African music, it was natural for him to include them spontaneously in the execution of the songs and dances, of European style, which he had to necessarily perform during holidays and social meetings, in order to make a living.

J.B. Rosemond de Beauvallon writes in 1844, referring to the Cuban dances performed by black musicians: "... This is no longer the French contredanse or the Spanish fandango. More original than the one, fierier than the other, this dance, perhaps indefinable, is perfectly in harmony with the character and personality of the young woman of Havana... [Its] airs are full of frechness and originality: but bristling with syncopations and measures in countertime, which renders them unusually difficult. The celebrated violoncellist Bohrer confessed to me that he tried in vain to decipher a contrabass part executed every night in the Havanera by a negro who couldn't read a note."⁶¹

The new Havana

During the second half of the 18th century, the economic and social situation of the island suffers a drastic change. Sustained up to that time by a subsistence economy and subject to numerous trade restrictions by the Spanish metropolis, Cuba is then directed through a path of development, aiming at the establishment of an economy based on the extended cultivation of various products destined to export, such as sugar cane, tobacco and coffee. This change is driven by two factors, the seizure of Havana by the English Crown in 1762, and the rule of the Bourbon Dynasty in Spain.

After taking control of Havana, the English administration immediately established the free trade with England and its colonies, which caused that during the year that the English domination lasted, more than seven hundred ships came to Havana with all sorts

⁶⁰ Duharte Jiménez, Rafael: *El ascenso social del negro en la cuba colonial*, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/BoletinAmericanista/article/viewFile/98534/146123>.

⁶¹ Sublette, Ned, 2004. P.125.

of goods and merchandise, a great difference compared to the five or six that were arriving during the Spanish government. During this period of time, the Cuban merchants could sell and buy freely at reasonable prices, which provided a substantial profit to them.⁶²

When Cuba returns to the Spanish rule in 1763, the commerce regulations are kept at a much wider tolerance level than before the British control, and this situation facilitates the strengthening of the economy. Also at that time, the Military Command (Capitanía General) acquires a greater importance and efficiency; more Spanish troops are assigned to the island and the local militias are created. As for Havana, the sugar industry benefits from a notable increase of the slave labor force brought by the Englishmen, and the shipyards, which had been partially destroyed during the capture of Havana, are reconstructed and improved.⁶³

According to Julio Le Riverend, during the last third of the 18th century, Havana "is radically transformed: from a stronghold, it changes to a commercial and industrial metropolis, from a stopover and transit point it becomes a place of roots and tradition; from the group of houses and huts (bohíos) around the "Plaza de Armas," mansions and palaces are born that line up in many streets and do not fit within Old Havana... Havana acquires the category of a fundamental event within the history of the region: it will dominate in all the territory as the Landlady."

Between the governments of Marqués de La Torre and Luis de Las Casas new fortresses were constructed, such as "La Cabaña," "El Príncipe" and "Atarés," and also the minor forts of "La Chorrera," "Cojímar" and the "Torreón de San Lázaro." The "Plaza de Armas" is born, which contained the Palaces of "Segundo Cabo" and "Capitanes Generales," and also the Major Parish (Parroquia Mayr), which at a later time became the Havana Cathedral, is installed. Between 1792 and 1794, the Grand Theater (Teatro Principal), also called of the "Coliseo" or of the "La Alameda," the orphanage "Casa de Beneficencia" and the "Alameda de Paula" were built.⁶⁴

Approximately from 1740, the first settlements called from "extramuros" (outside the walls) [since they were located outside the walls that protected the city] began to emerge. According to Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, "the first concentrations were born around the Arsenal [shipyard]... comprised by the people who worked on it..." One of the first conglomerates was called neighborhood of the Mangrove Swamp (El Manglar), precisely for being established over flooded terrain, which later became part of the

⁶² Guerra, Ramiro: *Historia elemental de Cuba*. Capítulo XIII, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, <http://www.guije.com/libros/historia01/c13/index.htm>.

⁶³ Naranjo Orovio, Consuelo y González-Ripoll, María Dolores: *Perfiles del crecimiento de una ciudad*, Dptos. de Historia de América e Historia de la Ciencia, Centro de Estudios Históricos (CSIC), Madrid, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/autor?codigo=555907>

⁶⁴ Sorhegui, *La trascendencia de la legislación en la evolución del puerto de la habana (1520 – 1880)*.

“District of Jesús María.” This neighborhood is described in the following manner by the Cuban folklorist author from the 19th century José Victoriano Betancourt: “...and we arrived to the “El Manglar,” located south from the neighborhood of “Jesús María”... disgusting pigsties where a large population, almost all from African origin, lived in petty shacks...”⁶⁵

The “Black Curros”

In that neighborhood of “El Manglar,” a social group settled down, which showed marked characteristics that solidly defined their identity, the Black Curros (Negros Curros). That group was comprised by free blacks that had arrived from Seville on a date that was not determined, which were integrated to the population of free blacks and mulattos that lived in the marginal zones of the city. About them, José Victoriano Betancourt said: “...they [the *curros*] had a peculiar aspect, and was enough to look at them to recognize them as *curros*: their long hunks of kinky braids, falling over their face and neck like big millipedes, their teeth cut (sharp and pointed) to the *carabalí* style, their fine embroidered cloth shirts, their pants, almost always white, or with colored stripes, narrow at the waist and very wide in the legs; the canvas shoes, cut low with silver buckles, the short jacket with pointed tail, the exaggerated straw hat, with black hanging silk tassles, and the thick gold hoops that they wore in their ears, from which they hung harts and padlocks of the same metal, forming an ornament that only they wear; recognize them as well by their way of swaggering as if they were hinged, and swaying their arms in front and back, by the singular inflection they give to their voice, for their unruly locution, and finally for the private language they speak, full of expressions and nonsense, that at times is unintelligible; those were the *curros* of *El Manglar*, famous in the annals of Jesús María for their slack ways and for their killings, that more than once caused the peaceful duelers of the neighborhood outside the city walls to tremble.”⁶⁶

The *curro* was dedicated to laziness, theft and procuring, while his companion, the *curra*, also called “mulata de rumbo”, exercised the prostitution. According to Carlos Noreña, she was well-known for the use of *burato* shawls of meticulous work and plaited fringes, for which they used to pay from nine to ten ounces of gold”, as well as by the typical clacking (*chancleteo*) they produced with their wooden slippers.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Betancourt, José Victoriano: *Los curros del manglar*, *El Artista*, tomo I, núm. 21, domingo 31 de diciembre de 1848, p. 315-318. Retrieved: August 25,2010, <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/68060620217137506322202/p0000011.htm#55>.

⁶⁶ Betancourt, *Los curros del manglar*.

⁶⁷ Noreña, Carlos: *Los negros curros*, *Costumbristas cubanos del siglo XIX*, Selección, prólogo, cronología y bibliografía Salvador Bueno, Retrieved: August 25,2010, <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/68060620217137506322202/p0000011.htm#55>.

The Black *curros* were a perfect example of convergence between the Hispanic and the African cultures. The *curro* was *cheche* (bully) and *chulo* (pimp). He combined the boasting of the Andalusian *majo* with a knife hidden in his waistband, the bravery of the African warrior, and certain characteristics of both cultural universes. [Figure 22].

According to Pedro Descamps-Chapeau, cited by Ivor Miller, it seems that the black *curro* preserved some ancestral African traditions, such as filing their teeth to a pointed shape, in the style of the *carabalí* slaves. Descamps-Chapeau also explains that their songs (fandangos) and dances were performed in the “nación” style,⁶⁸ or in other words, preserving the traditional African style. This affirmation is confirmed by José Victoriano Betancourt, which utilizes to describe the chants of the black *curros*, a contemptuous tone very similar to the one of Francisco Baralt when referring to the dances of the black slaves. According to Betancourt, the chants of the *curros* where “like a sort of drone between melancholic and lewd.”⁶⁹

But the *curros* also improvised songs in “décimas” like the typical Sevillians and the Cuban creoles. Ivor Miller says that: “another anonymous song attributed to the nineteenth-century black *curros* utilizes vernacular Spanish and Abakua [Éfik]. Called “Décimas” after its poetic form, it expresses a shared cultural practice wherein black *curros* and Cross River Ekpé fused to create a poetic-braggadaccio characateristically Habanero, male and working class.”

The Décima begins as follows: Sámbila from Havana arrived / I am the black *curro*, and continues:

You are as stupid as my horse
(*Nesio eres cual mi bayo*)
When it is ill
(*cuando le sale espereja*)
You surrender to my flag
(*te rindes a mi bandera*)
If not I part you in two
(*o si no te parto el guayo*)
We will see, fool
(*bamos a ber so sipayo*)

naeriero amoropó
aproseme y a copó
inuá aborobuto écue
momí asarorí abanekue
*abaireme ecuefó*⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Miller, Ivor L.: *Voice of the leopard*, University Press of Mississippi/Jackson, 2009, p. 80.

⁶⁹ Baralt, *Escenas campestres. Baile de los negros*.

⁷⁰ Miller, 2009: 80-81.

From Agustín W. Reyes, quoted by Fernando Ortiz in his book *Los Negros Curros* (The Black Curros), we have received even more information about the association of the *black curros* with music. According to Ortiz: "...A. W. Reyes refers to some black curros from Havana calling them *de bandurria* (of bandurria).⁷¹ He says: "The black *cheches* (bullies), of *chancleta* (flip-flops) and *bandurria*, differ very much from the drum players, that never aspire to raise to such a high level..."⁷²

It is not difficult to imagine the black *curro*, with his long braids covered by a big *sombrero*, a golden ring hanging from the tip of his ear and a knife in his waistband, swaggering and boasting through the streets of *El Manglar* along with his black *curra*, or singing "guarachas" of picaresque lyrics and sensual "sandunguero" rhythm at the taverns surrounding the port of Havana, from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th.

Those "guarachas", due to their casual and improvised character, must have been initially sung without any instrumental accompaniment, or supported only by hand clapping or percussive sounds performed over a table or box, as María Teresa Linares says about the first "guarachas" from the 19th Century: "Those guarachas were only sung. There was no other motion but the undulation of the body to stress the rhythm while singing."⁷³ At a later time, maybe it was utilized a "guitarrillo" (small guitar), descendant from the Spanish guitar of four or five courses, such as the "tiple", so frequently mentioned in the Cuban literature from the 19th century, as well as his faithful companion, the güiro.

That way, the blacks and creole mulattos incorporated basic elements from the African rhythmic style to the formal structure of the Spanish song, first by binarizing the beats of the measures, then adding syncopations and counter times, as well as "sandungueras" micro time fluctuations to the melody, and finally assigning to creole instruments, such as the tiple and the güiro, the task of executing the rhythmic structure, which in its original African form was interpreted by the drums.

The strumming, plucking and scraping of those instruments constituted a real synthesis of the percussions and accents that comprised the accompaniment of the chants, ritual or secular, heard by the blacks in their feasts at the *Cabildos* and other informal gatherings. This affirmation is supported by Fernando Ortiz when he says, referring to the piano version of a popular rumba from the 19th century: "The piano part [...] strives to imitate the rhythms produced by the claves, drums and other instruments that used to accompany those rumbas."⁷⁴

⁷¹ A Spanish musical plucked strings musical instrument.

⁷² Ortiz, 1986: 7.

⁷³ Linares and Núñez, 1998: 112.

⁷⁴ Ortiz, 1965: 322.

It was not until the 19th century, with the emergence of the so-called urban rumba, *de solar* or *de cajón* (wooden box), in Havana and Matanzas, triggered by the abolition of slavery, that the songs of Hispanic origin, such as the *copla* (quatrain) and the *décima* (ten strophes verse) would have been accompanied by a group comprised only by instruments of African origin, as it was a tradition at the feasts of *Yuka*, or in the gatherings (*plantes*) of the Abakuá groups. And it was not until the 20th century that Afro-Cuban instruments, like the *claves*, *marímbula* (mbira) or *bongó*, could have occupied a place within the Cuban popular instrumental ensembles, along with the instruments of plucked strings from Hispanic origin.

The Guaracha and the Rumba

Guarachas occupied a prominent place in the development of the vernacular theatre in Cuba, which emergence, at the beginning of the 19th century, coincides with the appearance of the first native musical genres of the Nation. Francisco Covarrubias, considered as the father of the Cuban comic (bufo) theater, gradually substitutes in his plays, since 1812, the typical characters of the Spanish *tonadilla escénica* with creole characters such as *guajiros* (peasants), *monteros* (beaters), *carreteros* (cartwrights) and *peones* (peons). Those structural transformations were also associated with certain changes in the music that accompanied the dramatic plot, in other words, that the Spanish genres such as *jácaras*, *tiranas*, *boleras* and *villancicos*, were substituted by *guarachas*, *décimas* and *Cuban songs*.⁷⁵

According to Alejo Carpentier, “with Bartolomé José Crespo y Borbón [Galician writer and playwright, creator of a black character called Creto Gangá]... the characters of the Cuban comic theater (teatro bufo) were totally delineated... because with him the blacks entered the scene.”⁷⁶

But maybe one of the most important events in regard to the development of the native musical genres within the vernacular theater was the transformation of the *black curro* and the *mulata de rumbo* (black curra) (which had already disappeared since mid 19th century from the Havana urban landscape) in social prototypes manifested in the characters of that theatrical genre.

The *mulatas* Juana Chamicú and María La O, as well as the black *cheches* (bullies) José Caliente “who rips in half those who oppose him,”⁷⁷ Candela, “*negrito* that

⁷⁵ Carpentier, 1979: 182.

⁷⁶ Carpentier, 1979: 184.

⁷⁷ Carpentier, 1979: 185.

flies and cuts with the knife,” as well as the *black curro* Juan Cocuyo, were strongly linked to the characteristic image and ambiance of the *guaracha* and the *rumba*.⁷⁸

The image of the black *cheche*, which was characterized by big handkerchiefs tied around the neck and the waist, as well as shirts with wide sleeves full of swirls that are called today *guaracheras*,⁷⁹ was indeed a replica of its original model, the *black curro*. As his counterpart, the *cheche* wore “a handkerchief tied around the head, and over it a big *sombrero*, his pants were narrow at the waist and very wide in the legs, his shirt tied with a knot at the front, a ring in the ear and also slippers of deer hide that sounded boastfully when walking.”⁸⁰

According to María Teresa Linares, “the wardrobe of the “mulata de rumbo”, typical character of the *guaracha*, with her slippers of deer hide and her *Manila* shawl, was the one that was also attributed to the *black curra*, that was well-known for the image reflected in the colonial engraving, and the one that at a later time became the *rumbera*, with her skirt with a long tail full of swirls and a big scarf surrounding her neck, which she raised with her arms while wiggling her waist”.⁸¹ In that way, the *black curro* and the *mulata de rumbo* became, as Maria Teresa Linares has accurately pointed out, the *guarachero* and the *guarachera*, which images were to be also equivalent to those of the *rumbero* and the *rumbera*.

It seems that in reference to the utilization of the terms *rumba* and *guaracha*, we confront a case of polysemy, that is to say, of the use of two different words to denominate the same thing. In the following commentary by María Teresa Linares it becomes evident how imprecise are the terms *rumba* and *guaracha* for the purpose of defining a specific musical genre, when she says: “... during the first years of the 20th century, there were used at the end of the vernacular theater plays some musical fragments that the authors sang, and that were called *closing rumba* (*rumba final*)...” and she continues explaining that those [rumbas] “...were certainly *guarachas*.”⁸² To which we can add that the musical pieces used to close the plays may have been indistinctly called *rumbas* or *guarachas*, because those terms didn’t denote any generic or structural difference between them.

As a confirmation of the previously stated, Linares informs us subsequently that: “Some recordings of *guarachas* and *rumbas* have been preserved that are not different between them in the guitar parts – when it was a small group, duo or trio, or by the

⁷⁸ Linares, *La guaracha cubana. Imagen del humor criollo*.

⁷⁹ Linares, *La guaracha cubana. Imagen del humor criollo*.

⁸⁰ Linares, *La guaracha cubana. Imagen del humor criollo*.

⁸¹ Linares, *La guaracha cubana. Imagen del humor criollo*.

⁸² Linares and Núñez, 1998: 113.

theater orchestra or a piano. The labels of the recordings stated: *dialogue and rumba* (diálogo y rumba).⁸³

Another eloquent examples of the ambivalence of those terms are the *guarachas* and *rumbas* recorded by María Teresa Vera and Rafael Zequeira at the beginning of the 20th Century. They were only different because the *rumbas* were performed with an accompaniment of guitar and Cuban *clave*, while the *guarachas* were played just with the guitar; there was no other difference, they possessed the same formal structure, the same humorous character of the lyrics and the same rhythmic strumming of the guitar.⁸⁴



In her notes to the collection of recordings from the Vera-Zequeira duo from 1998, María Teresa Linares insists in applying the term *rumbas* to certain songs that were performed in the comic theater (Bufo Theater). In her commentaries she says: From the repertoire selected for this CD, when can observe the presence that the *rumba* had in the style that was sung in the vernacular theater... Those *rumbas* had an accompaniment of strummed guitar that more likely influenced the development that the *rumba flamenca* reached in Spain. In Cuba, those *rumbas* fulfilled the function of closing the short comic acts (sainetes) of the vernacular theater...⁸⁵

We believe that, because of its amplitude and universality, it is appropriate to utilize the term *rumba* with the purpose of identifying the *stylistic prototype* or original Euro-African model, that was gradually configured in some urban centers related to the Spanish commercial routes of Ibero-America, and emerged to the public knowledge as the *guaracha* from the Havana dance balls at the beginning of the 20th century.

The *rumba* is, in its wider meaning, a general and abstract concept, which covers an ample gamut of particularities, while other terms such as *guaracha*, *cumbia* and *candombe* refer to specific individual genres. According to what have been previously exposed, we may affirm that the *guaracha* is a derivative from the *rumba*, but not that the

⁸³ Linares and Núñez, 1998: 113.

⁸⁴ Vera, María Teresa y Zequeira, Rafael: *Grabaciones Históricas – 1916-1924*, Notas de María Teresa Linares, Tumbao Cuban Classics 1998. D.L.B. 11870, 1998, CD.

⁸⁵ Vera y Zequeira, *Grabaciones Históricas – 1916-1924*.

rumba derives from the *guaracha*. According to Alejo Carpentier "...everything fits on her [the rumba]; all the constituent rhythms of Cuban music, apart from the black rhythms that may fit the melody. Everything apt to be admitted by a two by four meter is accepted by this genre that, more than a genre, is an *atmosphere*."⁸⁶

Emilio Grenet comments on this subject that "...it is not the form who determines what is substantially generic in the *guaracha*, but its content, its theme, which because of the environment that it portrays, imprints its typical movement to this genre..." In other words, in his opinion, the identity of the *guaracha* as a musical genre was not determined by essential structural elements; only the theme exposed in the lyrics established a distinctive factor in comparison to other genres. In accordance to this concept, continues saying Grenet: "We could place *La Palmira* from Moisés Simons, *that he called rumba*, [highlighted by the author] within the frame of the typical *guaracha*."⁸⁷ This is equivalent to say that, although Simons classifies *La Palmira* as a rumba; taking into account its structural characteristics it may be considered a *guaracha* because of the thematic character of its lyrics.

In a general sense, it is possible to affirm that the *guaracha*, in its early stages, was a type of *rumba* with a humorous, satirical or picaresque theme. As María Teresa Linares explains: "The *guaracha*, as a style of song with a fast rhythm and humorous text, always depicted a political or social event, a situation about a popular character or an attitude that was described in a picaresque way..."⁸⁸

In its semantic aspect, the word rumba was part of a group of terms that possess a similar meaning. That group includes such denominations as *conga*, *milonga*, *bomba*, *tumba*, *samba*, *bamba*, *mambo*, *tambo*, *tango*, *cumbé*, *cumbia* and *candombe*. All of them denote an African origin, and particularly from Congo, due to the presence of peculiar combinations of sounds, such as *mb*, *ng* and *nd*, which belong to the Niger-Congo linguistic complex.⁸⁹ All those generic denominations are related, in one way or another, to the essential elements of the *rumba*.

The most general meaning of the word *rumba* is that of a feast or *holgorio*. In a short story titled "La mulata de rumbo", the Cuban folklorist from the 19th century Francisco de Paula Gelabert refers in several occasions to the parties, in which the main character participated, utilizing the word *rumba*, *rumbita* or *rumbas*, as in the following examples: "...I have more enjoyment and fun in a *rumbita* with those of my color and

⁸⁶ Carpentier, 1979: 192.

⁸⁷ Grenet, Emilio: *Música cubana. Orientaciones para su conocimiento y estudio*, Artículo publicado en: *Panorama de la música popular cubana*. Selección y prólogo de Radamés Giro, Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1998, p. 87.

⁸⁸ Linares, *La guaracha cubana. Imagen del humor criollo*.

⁸⁹ *Lenguas Níger-Congo*: Wikipedia, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenguas_N%C3%ADger-Congo.

class...”, or “Leocadia was going to bed, as I was telling you, nothing less than at twelve noon, when one of his friends from the *rumbas* arrived, along with another young man that he wanted to introduce to her...”⁹⁰ According to Alejo Carpentier “...it is significant that the word rumba have passed to the Cuban language as a synonym of *holgorio*, lewd dance, merrymaking with low class women (mujeres del rumbo).”⁹¹

Rumba means also chant and dance. Let’s remember a quote from Carpentier about a new dance called *chuchumbé*, introduced in Veracruz by some immigrants of color (color quebrado) that arrived from Havana at the end of the 18th century. In his commentary, he highlights the “lewd intention” of their quatrains (coplas), which according to him: “had already the tone, the twist, the type of malice that we were going to find also in the Cuban *guarachas* from the 19th century.”⁹² Carpentier also states that “...when referring to the *chuchumbé*, the informant from the Holy Inquisition of Mexico writes: “The quatrains were sung while others danced, either between men and women or dancing four women with four men; the dance is with gestures, wiggings and shakings which are opposed to any honesty at all [...] because of being included on it some embraces and belly bumps...”⁹³ and he continues explaining in reference to a quote in which Moreau de Saint-Mery describes a dance, very similar to the previous one, at the end of the 18th century: “This description, more detailed and better written than the previous ones, contains all the choreographic elements of the *chuchumbé*, adding to it the cornerstone of the *rumba*: this movement of the hips while keeping still the rest of the body, and the hands holding the edges of a handkerchief or the skirt... It wasn’t in any other way that the *rumba* was danced, twenty year ago, in the Alhambra Theater.”⁹⁴

Carpentier also points out that “There were in a vast sector of the Continent some dances of black origin, of untangled couple, voluptuous and even lascivious, that received diverse names and were accompanied in different ways, without showing any essential difference between them. All of them were danced with music of a strong rhythm and great display of percussion. It could be the *resbalosa* in Argentina, the Dominican *calenda* or the *chuchumbé* brought by Cubans to Veracruz.” And he concludes categorically affirming that: “All of them [those dances] were rumbas.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ de Paula Gelabert, Francisco: *La mulata de rumbo, Costumbristas cubanos del siglo XIX*, Selección, prólogo, cronología y bibliografía Salvador Bueno, Retrieved: August 25, 2010, <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/68060620217137506322202/p0000011.htm#55>

⁹¹ Carpentier, 1979: 193.

⁹² Carpentier, 1979: 52.

⁹³ Carpentier, 1979: 53

⁹⁴ Carpentier, 1979: 54

⁹⁵ Carpentier, 1979: 192.

In the following example of an ancient anonymous rumba [Figure 24], we can observe the rhythmic characteristics that we have previously mentioned in reference to the *guaracha*, that is to say, the binary meter, the syncopation, and the presence of certain peculiar rhythmic patterns, derived from the ancient ternary cells of the *sesquiáltera* Spanish song-dances, such as the Cuban *tresillo* that appears in the bass part.

The musical score is written in 2/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of two systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are: "Am - be - re - ma - yo - rá, - am - be - ré!". The piano accompaniment features a syncopated bass line with a pattern characteristic of the *tresillo* rhythm.

Fig. 24 - Ambere Mayrá. Anonymous Ruma from the 19th century.⁹⁶

Finally, we would like to point out that the word *rumba* refers to the resultant product from a confluence of elements of style that include all the components of the musical structure, such as form, texture, melody and rhythm. That original product, which we can call the *rumba prototype*, was the result of a process of cultural fusion, in which were combined certain European components such as the lyrics, the tonal relationships (Major-Minor), the melodic and harmonic structures, and the quatrain-refrain (copla-estribillo) form, with syncopated rhythmic patterns and micro-metric fluctuations (micro time) of African origin.

The rural rumba

While the Cuban *contradanza* continued on a path of success during the first half of the 19th century, the modest *guaracha* also advanced in the preference of the citizens,

⁹⁶ Ortiz, 1965: 322.

becoming a favorite of the Vernacular Theatre, and in the most popular environments. Very soon, the *rumba prototype*; which was the result of a fusion of certain European components, such as the tonal modes (Major-Minor), the harmonic and melodic structures, the *copla-estribillo* form, and the text in Spanish; with other characteristics of African origin as the syncopated rhythms and microtime displacements,⁹⁷ would be extended all throughout the island and passed from the urban environment to the rural, as the songs and dances of *sesquialtera* rhythm had previously transferred from the city to the countryside.⁹⁸ And this process is not difficult to imagine, if we consider that the urban and rural areas were truly very close one from the other in 19th century Cuba.

In fact, until the end of the XVIII century the territory of the island was composed of some relatively small urban areas, which were scattered over a vast rural area; and due to this fact, the interaction between the city and the countryside was always constant and active. In the city of Havana, for example, if somebody went outside the walls surrounding the town center adjacent to the coast, he did not had to travel through a great extension of land to get already immersed in a predominantly agrarian agricultural environment.

Felicia Chateloin, a specialist in preservation of the urban heritage says, referring to the city of Havana, that "in the middle of the 18th century, in a belt from 20 to 24 kilometers surrounding the city, around eighty sugar mills were located to which several roads arrived that communicated different parts of the territory. Those sugar mills needed fertile lands and forests for the timber-felling in order to obtain the necessary energy for its operations, but as the forest resources were depleted those production centers started to move away from the city, leaving behind free land to be populated, and this situation favored the development of new urban areas. The population in those working areas increased and the strategy to balance the population consisted of the distribution of small agrarian-urban towns across a wide cultivated region."⁹⁹ In the last decades of the 18th century the territory outside the walls called "extramuros" had a stable population of small rural villages, but they developed far away from the walls.¹⁰⁰

The incorporation of the railroad as a means of transportation during the nineteenth century, contributed to the maintenance of an effective and direct communication between the urban enclaves in continuous expansion and the rural areas. To this level of communication refers Felicia Chateloin in the next comment: "In 1837, the inauguration of the railways allowed the transportation, with a reasonable freight, of

⁹⁷Ver: p. 52.

⁹⁸ Rolando A. Pérez Fernández: *La binarización de los ritmos ternarios africanos en América Latina*, Ediciones Casa de Las Américas 1986, p. 68.

⁹⁹ Felicia Chateloin: *El patrimonio cultural urbano y el criterio de centro histórico*. Caso de estudio: Ciudad de La Habana. Tesis. 2008, p. 77.

¹⁰⁰ Chateloin. 2008: 78.

the sugar production to the Havana port and diversified the image that its settlers had from the Havana region; it could be said it was done by cutting short the distances." ¹⁰¹

The proximity and the high level of communication between the urban and rural areas also facilitated a social and cultural interaction between the city and the countryside. That is why in the nineteenth century Havana, black *caleseros* (calash drivers) played *tiple* (a treble guitar) and improvised *décimas* (ten strophes meter songs) as the white peasants, as it has been documented by some chroniclers of the time. According to Philip Pasmanik: "Maria Teresa Linares cites documents that clearly show that already around 1830, the Afro-Cuban servants in the capital city sang *llanto* (crying, lament), an early version of Cuban *punto*, using the *tiple* and the *güiro*, and his songs were frequently *décimas* [Linares, personal communication]. The verb *decimar*, which means improvise a ten strophe meter song, was used in those times by afro-cubans of Congolese origin. The *rumberos* (rumba players) still say *decimar* in reference to the poetic improvisation, even when the form is not comprised of a ten strophe verse." ¹⁰²

It is due to the proximity and wide social interaction between the urban and rural areas in Cuba that, in accordance with some oral traditions, from the mid-19th century the Cuban peasants began to include in its feasts, called "guateques" or "changüís", as well as in other popular celebrations like the "parrandas" and the "fiestas patronales", some *rumbitas* of binary rhythm similar to the dances who were enjoying so much popularity in the city, which differed from the typical ternary, or ternary - binary tunes of its traditional repertoire.

Some of those danceable tunes of the peasants, like the *Caringa*, the *Papalote*, *Doña Joaquina*, the *Anda Pepe* and the *Tingotalango*, called by the musicologist Danilo Orozco *proto-sones*, *soncitos original*, *rumbitas*, *nengones* or *marchitas* (little marches), ¹⁰³ have been preserved by the tradition until our days [Figures 25 and 26].



Fig. 25 – The Caringa ¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Chateloin. 2008: 77.

¹⁰² Pasmanick, Philip: *Décima y Rumba*, p. 9. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/16634116/Decima-y-Rumba-Completo>. Retrieved: May 26, 2015.

¹⁰³ Leonardo Acosta: *De los complejos genéricos y otras cuestiones*. En: *Otra visión de la música popular cubana*. Editorial Letras Cubanas. La Habana, 2004. Pág. 58.

¹⁰⁴ Conjunto Artístico Anacaona: *La caringa*, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak-pnKbJcl4>, Retrieved: 8 de junio, 2015.

Fig. 26 – The Papalote ¹⁰⁵

Of course, these *rumbitas* were called *proto-sones* by Orozco due to the fact that its structural components and the analogy that those components show with the *son*, which arises in Havana during the twenties, they can be considered as a embryonic prototype of this well known genre of Cuban popular music.

These *rumbitas campesinas* (peasant *rumbitas*) were mentioned by Maria Teresa Linares in his work "The music between Cuba and Spain" in the following way: "The description of Salas Quiroga greatly corresponds to other similar testimonies... of peasants who met in bodegas, saints vigils, *guateques* (dance parties), *canturías* (singing gatherings) the days of the Holy Patrons or for other reasons. They spent long hours singing and dancing *zapateo* and other *rumbitas*."¹⁰⁶

Argeliers León also tells us referring to these songs and dances that: "The same rural population took the old refrains in alternation with octosyllable quatrains that were an easy way to transmit a picaresque brief idea, or a momentary circumstance, thus repeating in Cuba what was arriving from the Spanish *coplero* (folk songs) ... With this modality of expression some *sones* or *soncitos* emerged..."¹⁰⁷

According to the renowned Cuban musicologist Virtudes Feliú, the popular feasts or *parrandas* where these rural *rumbitas* were played were "held mostly in the western and central areas of the country, especially at Ciego de Avila, Sancti Espíritus, Cienfuegos, Pinar del Río and less frequently in Camagüey" ... while the *changüí* was more "commonly held in the oriental area". Virtues Feliú also tells us as about the preservation of those feasts that: "The rural "parrandas" of Vila (province of Ciego de Avila) are known since the middle of the last century and they still exist."¹⁰⁸

Other locations where recent information and testimonies have been compiled about these cultural traditions are: to the East, Puerta de Golpe in Pinar del Río and

¹⁰⁵ Conjunto Artístico 20 Aniversario: *El papalote*, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_KjEXoxY7U, Retrieved: June 8, 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino. 1998: 58.

¹⁰⁷ León, Argeliers: *Del canto y del tiempo*. Editorial Pueblo y Educación. La Habana, Cuba, 1981, p. 29.

¹⁰⁸ Feliú, Virtudes: *La fiesta. Fiestas populares tradicionales de Cuba*. IADAP, Instituto andino de artes populares, p. 74-75.

Bejucal in Havana, as well as in Sancti Spíritus and Remedios in Villa Clara, located at the center of the Island.

"On the former Isla de Pinos [now called Isla de la Juventud], at the western end of Cuba, testimonies also have been collected about the *peasant rumbitas*, such as the following, quoted by María Teresa Linares:..." my mother and my grandmother already danced *cotunto* when I was born... previously, they referred to the *sucu-sucu* as *cotunto*... they danced *caringa*, *zapateo*, and *cotunto*, which was some sort of *rumbita*."¹⁰⁹ "Through various old *soneros* (*son* performers), *Compay Cotunto* was founded, and it was like a *montunito*, a *primitive son*" [Figure 27].¹¹⁰



Fig. 27 – Compay Cotunto.¹¹¹

The references about the Cuban Independence Wars (1868 a 1898) that we frequently find in regard to the *rural rumba* in the oriental region, as well as in the occidental region and Isle of Pines (Isla de Pinos), suggest that the emergence and development of this modality of *peasant rumbas* happened within a chronological period that corresponds with the second half of the 19th century.

María Teresa Linares mentions the period of the Wars of Independence in reference to a well known *rumbita* or *soncito* called *Caimán en el Guayabal*, when she tells us: "It has been orally transmitted that there was a symbolic system for communicating messages during the war. When the Spanish troops came closer, the observer went where he was supposed to inform and hung his *machete* and his hat and then they asked him: Where is the *caimán*? And he responded: The *caimán* is on the road / and he doesn't let me go through"¹¹² [Figure 28].



¹⁰⁹ Linares, María Teresa: *El sucu-sucu en Isla de Pinos*, La Habana, Academia de Ciencias de Cuba, 1970.

¹¹⁰ Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino. 1998: 158.

¹¹¹ Medina, Candelita: *Compay Cotunto*, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJL9Q0guGVQ>. Retrieved: June 8, 2015.

¹¹² Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino. 1998: 149-150.

Fig. 28 – Caimán en el guayabal.¹¹³

The famous lutenist and interpreter of the *sucu-sucu*, Mongo Rives, refers to the war in an interview by Ramón Leyva, in which he expresses the following in regard to the well known *sucu-sucu* titled: *Ya los majases no tienen cueva*: "This theme was composed as a taunt to a Spanish *Mayoral* (foreman) called Felipe Blanco y Hernández. It must be said that on the Island there was a revolt on July 26, but from the year 1896... Those conspirators hid themselves in the caves that exist in the "Sierra Las Casas" hills. Felipe Blanco offer them shelter and food at his home and [after that] he turned them over to the Spanish authorities. Because of his betrayal, the rebels were brutally slaughtered." ¹¹⁴

Danilo Orozco also provides information about the use of *rumbitas*, *sones* or *primeval proto-sones* in the "Mambises" (Cuban fighters) camps during the war: "...the *songs of critique* and many other types of *primeval soncitos* were also used in the Mambises camps and in posterior patriotic social contexts. On the other hand, the great majority of such songs were related in one way or another to the *sonero* music, either within the oldest transition period with the employment, for example, of specific types of hand-clapping and certain melodic-rhythmic traits that might have been even found in the *nengón* model, or already in *primeval sones*, and other manifestations..."¹¹⁵

In regard to the Afro-Cuban influence evidenced by those *soncitos* or *rumbitas*, Virtues Feliú indicates: "the approach to the most populated areas causes that the peasant begins to assimilate forms of dances that were typical of the black population, although this assimilation doesn't go beyond an imitative gesture, a version of what the peasant perceived, shaped by the union of the Hispanic and the African" ", to such an extent that he established his own images in dances such as *el Papalote*, *el Gavilán* and *la Caringa* in the so called *Rumbitas Campesinas*..."¹¹⁶

But in fact it was not necessary for the white peasant to imitate the music and the dance of the blacks, since the same Afro-Cuban peasants took active part in the creation of those original *rumbitas*, and imprinted on them the stamp of its cultural tradition.

¹¹³ Mango Time, Grupo: *Caimán en el guayabal*, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPXmy-VmbHg>. Retrieved: 8 de junio de 2015.

¹¹⁴ Leyva Morales, Ramón: Entrevista a Mongo Rives, El Rey del Sucu-suco, <http://carapachibey.blogspot.com/2013/12/carpachibey-con-el-rey-del-sucu-suco.html>. Consultado: Mayo 24, 2015.

¹¹⁵ Orozco, Danilo: *Antología Integral del Son*. CD, Virgin Records España S.A., 1999. Disk 1, track 21.

¹¹⁶ Feliú Virtudes: *Las fiestas de origen hispánico en Cuba*. Sala de conferencias sobre cultura hispano-cubana, coordinado por la Dra. Carmen Almodóvar. Sociedad Canaria de Cuba. 7 de septiembre de 2010. Retrieved: February 15, 2012: http://www.cce.co.cu/Art&Conf/Conf_FIESTAS_ORIGEN_HISPANICO.html

Already since the 16th century, the black slave began to integrate into the rural population as a free peasant, due to the existence of the "manumisión", by means of which he could pay its proprietor to buy his freedom, as it appears in a royal certificate from 1526.¹¹⁷

According to the historian Manuel Moreno Fragnals, quoted by Rafael Duarte Jimenez, "The exceptional historical process of the 17th and 18th centuries, had formed a black and mulatto middle-class of respectable economic level, that also owned mills and slaves." And also adds Duarte that in the Cuban rural universe, free blacks and mulattoes cultivated the land into small small farms *sitierías* (*sitierías*) or exploited labor estates, farms (*estancias*) and even some small sugar mills (*trapiches*).¹¹⁸

Duarte Jiménez also describes in his work the case of the mulatto (*morena*) Juana María Limonta, which, together with her husband Tomás Sánchez bought his freedom during the eighteenth century, and came to own a farm (*estancia*) with animals and two slaves, which she left as an inheritance to her granddaughter by means of a testament.¹¹⁹

The establishment of a plantation economy and the rise of the sugar industry since the end of the 18th century certainly represented a setback for the integration of the free black to the agrarian society, because the exploitation of the slave increased, and certain privileges acquired by the free black farmers were further limited. But the beginning of the independence wars in the middle of the 19th century provided the necessary impulse for the movement that resulted in the final abolition of slavery in 1886.

It is then when the rest of the Afro-Cuban population that still suffered under a humiliating condition of slavery, is finally liberated from its confinements in the barracks of the *centrales* (sugar mills) and integrates to the population centers, both in the country of Cuba as well as in the cities. It is clear that in spite of the fact that those slaves were officially free to settle wherever they wanted, obvious restrictions continued to exist for its integration into the main social centers, which were dictated by the customs in vogue; and this is how this new citizens became part of relatively segregated groups that settled mainly in small rural villages, in the sugar mills small towns (*bateyes*) of the *centrales* (sugar mills communities) and in the *solares* (slums or multi-family apartment buildings) in the cities.

In the notes to a research paper published with the name of "Anthology of the Afro-Cuban music", written by Marta Esquenazi and Maria Teresa Linares, they refer to

¹¹⁷ Duarte Jiménez, Rafael: *El ascenso social del negro en la cuba colonial*, p.31. Retrieved: November 29, 2013, <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/BoletinAmericanista/article/viewFile/98534/146123>

¹¹⁸ Duarte Jiménez: 33.

¹¹⁹ Duarte Jiménez: 34.

a group of Congo slaves located in the tobacco cultivation area of Vueltabajo (west of Pinar del Rio and south of Sierra de los Organos) that, when slavery was abolished, established themselves in the area of Nueva Filipina (also in Pinar del Rio). Esquenazi and Linares tell us that... "Those Congos, despite being located in remote areas that were difficult to access, in the middle of wild entangled mounts, used to meet on Sundays to celebrate their Yuka drum feasts, a habit that had begun in the slave barracks during colonial times".

In that way, the increasing integration of black people to the society during the 19th century determined that a larger quantity of essential elements from their culture started to exert an influence in the predominantly Hispanic style that had prevailed until that time; and it was in that way that within the musical genres cultivated in the rural areas, new characteristics from the African culture began to manifest.

Characteristics of the new style

One of the most evident characteristics showed by the *rumbitas campesinas* is related to its formal structure, which was usually based on a single phrase or musical fragment of short duration that was repeated with slight variations during the entire performance of the piece. This repeated phrase was called *montuno* (from then mount or countryside) as time passed by, because of its rural origin.

This peculiar style of formal development, which consists of a series of consecutive variations of a single musical phrase is typical of the African music, which gives greater importance to the rhythmic development than to the melody, unlike the European style, where the rhythm section primarily functioned as a support for the melodic-harmonic texture.

In reference to this subject the musicologist J. H. Kwabena Nketia says to us that "...as African music leans toward the percussion and the percussive textures, there is an understandable emphasis on rhythm, since the interest of the rhythmic material often compensates for the absence of melody or the lack of melodic sophistication." Also in regard to the formal elaboration of the melody Nketia continues saying: "The solos can be organized either in the form of strophes (a simple verse repeated, often with slight variations, for a certain number of stanzas), or in the form of a series of recitations or non-strophic cumulative expressions..."¹²⁰

In 1864, Francisco Baralt, a Catalan folklorist (costumbrista) author, already mentions the characteristic reiterative form of the African chants in his story named *Dance of the blacks* (Baile de negros): "The lacking of those monotonous chants, three or four at the most, is compensated by the amazing multitude of strophes, allow me to call this way their words without rhyme or measure, to which they are adapted with notable

¹²⁰ Nketia. 1974: 140.

easiness: any event of the party, the plantation, or the neighboring city is formulated in ten or twelve words and pass to the tune that thir relatives sang..."¹²¹

Both in the African music as in the Cuban *rumbitas campesinas*, the form that was comprised of consecutive variations of a specific motive was often interpreted in a way that involves antiphonal singing by a soloist that alternates with a choir, which interprets the same phrase in the form of a refrain (estribillo).¹²²

Another feature of the African music that is manifested in the rural *rumbitas* is the overlapping of various rhythmic patterns executed simultaneously. Kwabena Nketia says that "... the use of multiple rhythmic structures is a very normal practice in the African music." And continues explaining that: "Instead of using a single accompanying idiophone, several of these instruments can be executed at the same time in the rhythm section, and each one of those can reinforce the basic pulse in a particular way." Alejo Carpentier refers to this practice in his commentary on the Cuban Son in his book "The music in Cuba", when he says: "The great revolution operated by the notions in the *son* battery consisted of giving us *the sense of polyrhythm subjected to a time unit*... Within a general tempo, each percussive instrument held an autonomous life..."¹²³

The very slow and gradual expansion during a long period of time of the group of instruments used by the rural musicians, from the original combination of *tiple* and *güiro* until the inclusion of the guitar, the *bandurria*, the Cuban *lute*, the *claves*, and other instruments like the *tumbandera*, the *marímbula*, the *botija*, the *bongo*, the common *machete* and the *accordion*, facilitated the implementation of the previously mentioned polyrhythmic style, since the different components of the texture were assigned to different instruments. These diverse rhythmic and timbrical contrasting layers have been named as "tone stripes" (frangas de sonoridades) by Argeliers León, and at a later time as "action stripes" (frangas de acción) by Danilo Orozco.¹²⁴

This way, to the Cuban *claves*, which according to Fernando Ortiz were originated in the Port of Havana area,¹²⁵ was assigned an essential function within the group texture that has been defined by Kwabena Nketia as follows: "Due to the difficulty to maintain an internal metronomic sense (while several additive and divisive rhythms are

¹²¹ Baralt, Francisco: *Escenas campestres. Baile de los negros. Costumbristas cubanos del siglo XIX*, Selección, prólogo, cronología y bibliografía Salvador Bueno, Consultado: Agosto 25, 2010, http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/costumbristas-cubanos-del-siglo-xix--2/html/fe805c0-82b1-11df-acc7-002185ce6064_7.htm

¹²² Linares y Núñez, 1998: 85.

¹²³ Carpentier, 1979: 196.

¹²⁴ Eli, Victoria y Gómez Zoila: *El complejo del Son*. Universidad de Chile. Retrieved: July 7, 2014. <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/40027444/El-complejo-del-Son>

¹²⁵ Ortiz, Fernando: *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana*. Ministerio de Rducación, Habana, 1952.

executed in phrases of different extension), the African tradition facilitates this process through the externalization of the basic pulse... by hand clapping or the percussion of an idiophone... From this procedure a conductive line results that is associated to the *time unit*, which is called *Time-Line*".¹²⁶

That guiding rhythm is commonly known within the Cuban musical tradition as "Cuban *clave*" (Clave Cubana) or "*clave* Rhythm" (Ritmo de Clave).¹²⁷

Led by the *Time-Line* other rhythmic patterns stand out within the group, such as the one executed by the *guiro*, which sometimes is also played by a common *machete*, or the one provided by the *tres*, this hybrid instrument with a guitar elongated body and lute strings that was born in the Cuban countryside.

The *tres* substitutes the *tiple*, the *bandurria* and the *lute* in their function of plucked strings, and provides an important structural element that has been called *guajeo*, which is supposed to be related to the patterns that were brought to the group by the *mbira* or *marímbula* from Congo origin.¹²⁸

The rhythmic arpeggios of the *guajeo* generally moved in counter-time against the basic rhythm of the *clave* (Time-Line), which tended to stress the strong beat of the measure, thus contributing to the rhythmical complexity effect that is characteristic of the African style.

Another important layer of the polyrhythmic texture was provided by the *bongo*, an autochthonous bi-membrane drum which origin is directly related to the African musical tradition that was gradually incorporated to the typical peasant groups (grupos campesinos). In the most ancient examples that have been preserved until our time, the *bongo* kept a stable rhythm that configured a counterpoint with that of the *clave*,¹²⁹ but at a later time it evolved to become something like a soloist for the group, in the style of the more traditional ensembles of original African music, such as the Yuka, Abakuá and Yoruba; where one of the drums (usually the lowest pitch drum) participated as a soloist, freely improvising rhythmic patterns.

Finally, we have the instruments that played the lowest level of the musical texture, among which we find the *tumbandera* or *tumbantón*, a primitive string instrument from African origin that was temporarily implemented in the same place where it was going to be played. It consisted of "a hole opened in the ground, which hollowness served as resonator and was covered by an envelope made of *yagua* (a slice

¹²⁶ Nketia. 1974: 131.

¹²⁷ Orovio, Helio: *Cuban music from A to Z*. Tumi Music Ltd. Bath, U.K., 2004, p. 54.

¹²⁸ Wikipedia: *Guajeo*, Retrieved: February 14, 2013, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guajeo>,

¹²⁹ Orozco, Danilo: *Antología del Son*.

of a palm tree leaf) that was fixed to the ground by some small pieces of wood. At the center of the *yagua* a string made of an animal or vegetal fiber was tied and its opposite end was attached to a flexible shaft or the branch of a tree. This instrument was plucked and sometimes was also beaten with sticks over the *yagua* and the string.”¹³⁰

Other instruments that occupied the lowest sections of the texture were the *botija* (earthenware jug), which consisted of a simple clay recipient with a lateral whole to blow through, and the *marímbula*, an instrument of Bantu (Congo) origin, closely related to the African *mbira* or *sanza*.

The anticipated bass, typical of this style, caused that this section of the musical texture became another participant between the different layers that were part of the rhythmic counterpoint, instead of being, like in the European style, the basis of the harmonic structure. At the same time, the function of guide and support or *time-line*, was transferred to the highest levels of the textures and assigned to the Cuban *clave*.

The urban rumba

Only scarce documentation exists on the origin of a style of rumba called *rumba of solar* (rumba de solar) or *de cajón* (wooden box) (due to the fact that a wooden box was the principal sound medium utilized in its inception) which, according to the oral tradition, emerged to the public light between the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in some areas of Havana and Matanzas. According to the percussionist and expert in afro-cuban music David Peñalosa: "...it must be mentioned in first place that the history of the *rumba* is so full of unknown facts, contradictions, conjectures, and myths, which from time to time have been taken as realities, that any final profile on this genre is probably impossible to reconstruct. Even the elderly who were present at certain historical junctures of the development of *rumba* often differ on critical details of its story.”¹³¹

The *rumba de solar* possesses extraordinary importance, because it is the first Cuban musical product, generated by the fusion of elements from the Hispanic and African cultures which is performed only with instruments of African descent. Its structural characteristics are perfectly adjusted to the *prototype of the rumba*, which we have mentioned above, since its form and language are predominantly Hispanic while its rhythm is characteristically Afro-Cuban; but in this specific case, the instruments through which this popular genre is interpreted are not the traditional Hispanic plucked string instruments, but the Afroid percussive membranophones and idiophones that remained hidden from the public eye for centuries.

¹³⁰ Eli, Victoria y Gómez Zoila: *El complejo del Son*. Universidad de Chile. Retrieved: July 7, 2014. <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/40027444/El-complejo-del-Son>

¹³¹ Peñalosa, David: *Rumba Quinto*. Redway, CA, Bembe Books, 2011(xxii) ISBN 1-4537-1313-1

As I mentioned previously, due to its humble and informal nature, and most probable also because of the fact that since the disappearance of the *comparsas of the "Three Kings Day"*, at the end of the nineteenth century, the use of drums of African origin was officially banned by the authorities in Havana, this type of rumba was not executed precisely with drums, but with wooden boxes (*cajones*). According to Argeliers Leon "...from the dashboard of the wardrobe or the door to the wooden board division that limited the room, they went over to the boxes in which salted cod was imported. Those drawers were of good wood and of a very adequate sonority... They drew the wood slabs from the cod boxes, which junctures came with dovetail joints; they were filed and then assembled and pasted again, with what we had a perfect instrument..."¹³²

Development of the urban rumba

The first inhabitants of the slums (*solares*) built outside of the city walls, a mass consisting predominantly of free blacks and mulattos who worked at the port, the shipyards, and on small farms of the area around Havana, as well as the well-known black *curros*, were joined at a later time, after 1886, by many newly freed slaves that were mixed with other components of the poorest classes in society, such as numerous Chinese and Spanish (mostly from the provinces of Northern Spain), which had been hired to work in semi-slavery conditions in the rural areas since the mid-nineteenth century, and which were gradually settling at a later time in villages and cities.

In the dwellings of those slums of Havana and Matanzas called *solares* or *cuarterías*, many of whom were crudely implemented in old mansions, was where the fusion of races and cultural traditions that resulted in the birth of a new genre of *urban rumba* took place, which, as previously the *guaracha* and the *Cuban contradanza*, was made up of characteristics from Europe and Africa. As defined by Argeliers Leon... "On the feast that constituted a rumba, therefore, concurred certain African contributions, but also converged other elements of Hispanic root, which had been incorporated already to the expressions that appeared in the new population that arose in the Island ...*the rumba is not a deformed caricature or replica* of the original elements, but a new expression [made] with what the people have assimilated from them."¹³³

In regard to the Hispanic component of the *rumba de solar* the famous *rumbero* from the group *Los Muñequitos de Matanzas*, Esteban Lantrí ("Saldiguera") said that "the *inspiration* (improvisation) that is done in the *guaguancó* has a lot to do with the Spanish... everybody that sings *rumba* have to know that it has something Spanish on it... there are people who say it hasn't, but I, as the son of Spanish also, always heard that from my father and my grandfather..."¹³⁴ In spite of its strong African component, the

¹³² León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 141.

¹³³ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 140.

rumba de solar is certainly as mestizo and indigenous as the *guaracha* and the *Cuban contradanza*.

Originally, the *rumba* ensemble was comprised of three wooden boxes (cajones); the smallest one, called *quinto*, was built from some wooden boxes where wax candles were imported and participated as a soloist, improvising rhythmic patterns that in some occasions established a dialogue with the dancer. As we have previously mentioned in reference to the bongo, in this new *rumba* style, the highest pitch level represented by the *quinto* fulfilled the function of a soloist of the group, differently from other ancient styles (like the Congo, Yoruba and Carabalí), where the most salient part was located in the bass level. The second cajón was called *macho* or *tres-dos* (three-two), due to the fact that its essential rhythm was based on the Cuban *clave*, which possesses a distribution of accents correspondent to five beats, distributed in groups of 3-2 or 2-3 beats. The bigger box (cajón) was called *hembra* or *salidor* (female or starter), because it usually started or broke (rompía) the *rumba*. The original wooden boxes were replaced at a later time by cylindrical drums of a barrel-like convex shape that in its origin were tuned with pieces of wood attached by strings, and at a later time with modern metallic tuning pegs.¹³⁵

In the *rumba* ensemble there were also utilized the percussions with two spoons or small sticks over a hollow piece of bamboo called *guagua* or *catá*, the Cuban *claves*, the *güiro* and some rattles similar to the *maracas*, from Bantu origin, called *nkembi*.¹³⁶

Philip Pasmanick says in its important work *Décima and Rumba*: "The majority of the *rumba* songs, and especially the *guaguancós*, are carried out in the same way: first, an introduction without words called *diana* or *lalaleo*, with the alternation of soloist and duet that characterizes many Cuban musical styles. Sometimes a singer adds specialized musical ornaments called *floreos*. The body of the song called *inspiración* follows, where the *décima* appears if there is any, and finally the *montuno*, characterized by a refrain repeated by the choir, while the soloist improvises short phrases in a pattern of call and response." The following excerpt, taken from a presentation of the renowned vocalist Carlos Embale, exemplifies the foregoing:

Diana:

Na na na na, na na...

Inspiración:

When you would see great disenchantment (cuando tú, tu desengaño veas)

¹³⁴ Valdés, Oscar: La Rumba, documentary, Cuba, 1978. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SRYG3KQzD4>. Retrieved: May 22, 2015.

¹³⁵ Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino: 1998, p. 278-279.

¹³⁶ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 142.

from so many vane illusions that encourages you (de tantas ilusiones vanas que te alientan)
 you will look for all the darkest places (buscarás los lugares más oscuros)
 to cry in solitude so many sorrows (para poder llorar a solas tantas penas)

Na na na na, na na...

While I, when seeing you so sad and hurting (mientras yo al verte adolorida y triste)
 tell the world your newest feats (le cuente al mundo tus hazañas nuevas)
 and I would tell you, pretty black girl, never dare (y a ti te diga, negra linda, no te atrevas)
 to ever provoke the anger of the *roncos* (a provocar más nunca la ira de los roncós)

Of the *roncos*... Ay!... of the *roncos*... (De los roncós... ¡ay!... de los roncós...)

Montuno:

Come and enjoy the *Eden* of the *roncos* (Ven a gozar con el edén que tienen los roncós)
 especially for the beautiful ladies... (expresamente para las bellas...)

Come and enjoy Pinareña... come and enjoy Pinareña (Ven a gozar pinareña, ven a gozar pinareña...) [it is repeated indefinitely alternating soloist and choir]¹³⁷

As we can see in the previous commentary from Pasmanick, the vocal part of the rumba adjusts to the modified pattern of the ancient Spanish quatrain-refrain, including in this case, the novel section of the *montuno*, which we may consider an “expanded or developed refrain”¹³⁸ that acquires a special importance within the structure of the song, thus becoming a truly independent section, which usually includes the alternance of soloist and choir so typical of the African music style.

The melody of the vocal part, as well as the poetic meter, are usually greatly varied and flexible, according to Pasmanick: “The melodies of the *rumbas* are so varied as the textual structures, but for the *décima* in the *rumba*, as well as for the *décima* in the Cuban *punto*, the melody is not of primary importance... the soloist may select or improvise a *tonada* for his verse, as long as it functions well with the meter of the song and the characteristic *clave* pattern.”¹³⁹

Following is an example of the text of a *rumba* based on the tradicional *copla* with a quatrain meter, sung by Inés Carbonell:

¹³⁷ Embale, Carlos: El edén de los roncós, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3DMpNOdDfY>. Retrieved: June 7, 2015.

¹³⁸ Pasmanick, Philip: *Décima y Rumba*, p. 11. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/16634116/Decima-y-Rumba-Completo>. Retrieved: May 26, 2015.

¹³⁹ Pasmanick, Philip: p. 11.

Inspiración:

Hey, look here is the *mondongo* (Ay, mire aquí está el mondongo)
 that you ask from me to bring (que usted me mandó a buscar)
 and since I can't get inside (y como no puedo entrar)
 at the door I leave it to you (en la puerta se lo pongo)

I went with my dog *Trabuco* (Fui con mi perro Trabuco)
 to the mount to hunt *jutía* (al monte a cazar jutía)
 and to see if he was not able (y a ver si es que él no podía)
 to walk through all the *bejucos* (caminar por los bejucos)

Montuno:

Oh, mamá-buela...
 Oh, mamá-buela...¹⁴⁰

It makes reference to a topic widely used in the traditional rumba related to a dog named *Trabuco*, from which also says Pasmanick: "the famous *décima* of the dog *Trabuco* is sung with the *columbia*, the most intense of the three rhythms of *rumba*. I have heard the song in at least three variants. With his speaking and ironic dog, it suggests a genre of nonsense, but it also reflects a trend to the fantastic story [style] in order to make social criticism. This version is from Justi Barreto [Guaguanco '69, Justi Barreto and his folk group, Gema LPG 3072]."

I sent my good dog *Trabuco* (Mandé a mi perro Trabuco)
 To the mount to hunt *jutía* (al monte a cazar jutía)
 but he told me it was not possible (me dijo que no podía)
 for him to walk through *bejucos* [reeds] (caminar por los bejucos)
 look dog, I can get for you (mira perro, yo te busco)
 a mount which is firm and dense (un monte firme y espeso)
 no, my master, don't say that (No mi amo no es por eso)
 you know what is happening here (usted sabe lo que pasa.)
 that you will eat all the dough (que usted se come la masa)
 and leave for me just the bare bones (y a mí me deja los huesos.)¹⁴¹

From the many styles of the *rumba* that have been mentioned by the most ancient informants, like the *tahona*, the *jiribilla*, the *palatino* one and the *resedá*, among others, only three survive today. One of those surviving styles is the *yambú*, a very ancient *rumba* of slow rhythm, where according to Argeliers León "the dancers were adopting

¹⁴⁰ Rumba en casa de Amado con Inés Carbonell, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AIYpp8F5a8>. Retrieved: May 26, 2015.

¹⁴¹ Pasmanick, Philip: p. 14.

the attitude of an old age person and were imitating the difficulty in [the execution] of the movements”.¹⁴²

Another ancient style of *rumba*, the most ancient according to Raúl Martínez Rodríguez, is the one named *columbia*, which based on some informations emerge in a zone close to the town of Unión de Reyes in Matanzas, as well as in other adjacent towns such as Sabanilla and Alacranes.¹⁴³

This style of *rumba* is danced by a male soloist that boasts about his agile and acrobatic movements while at the same time establishes a dialogue with the *quinto* drum performer. The chanter, in turn, exposes various themes related to social subjects, people and facts, as well as utilizes, according to Argeliers León: “words from the *palero* [Congo] vocabulary or from the *Yoruba* or *Abakuá* languages...” Also says León that: “The melodic line from these songs comes to be a version of the melodic structures of the *palo* chants.”¹⁴⁴

The most modern style of *rumba de solar*, called *guaguancó* is also a couple’s dance, in which the participants engage in an imitation of the courting or wooing that some animals, like the hen and the rooster, use to perform. The male pursues the female and waits for the moment in which he can take her unprepared in order to execute a fast pelvic movement of a clear sexual connotation called *vacunado*. According to Argeliers León, “the initial part of the chant is extensive and acquires the character of a long story, almost always allusive to a fact or person...” Also according León, in some occasions the chanters utilize *décimas* for the improvisation of their texts, although they can also utilize simple *couplets*, “not necessarily *octosyllables* or a prose.”¹⁴⁵

In the novel *The Unzuazu Family* (1901), from the Cuban black intellectual and politician Martín Morúa Delgado (1857-1910) we find a valuable first-hand testimony on what appears to be a *rumba* dance in its origins, during the late nineteenth century. It describes the involvement of Liberato, a black slave, in what the author called *associations of rumba*, where we can appreciate the similarity between the details of this dance that involves several couples with the modern *rumba de cajón*. Morúa says: “Liberato had been reluctant to any attempt of intellectual culture. But, in exchange for this, as soon as he saw an opportunity he flew to the neighborhood of Antúnez, where the *associations of rumba* were free to act according to their whims and desires, always full of free men and women of *bronze* (colored) which organized parties with drummings and African style chants, following with great vividness the pace of the Cuban dance: and to

¹⁴² León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 143.

¹⁴³ Martínez Rodríguez, Raúl: *La rumba en la provincia de Matanzas*. Panorama de la música popular cubana. Editorial Letras Cubanas, La Habana, Cuba, 1998, p. 128.

¹⁴⁴ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 144.

¹⁴⁵ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 143-144.

the beat the couples danced, separated the individuals, in front one to the other. What could not be otherwise because the hustle and revolutions of the hips and of the whole body of the dancers were such that didn't allow any approach. Quite excited they were, even from far away, ending by dragging in the mud of the more rampant lasciviousness their extravagant dislocations; for which the man earned more popularity and enjoyed greater sympathy among women, and between the men the women that more unhingement showed in their libidinous swirling... "¹⁴⁶

Because of its close relationship with very specific, limited and humble cultural segments of the Cuban nation, and because of the bans and restrictions that this practice was subjected to for a long time, as well as the high degree of sophistication required for its execution, which is truly close to the strict requirements of an "initiation", the *rumba de solar* never achieved a widespread diffusion within the population of the island, and is preserved even today, such as other folkloric manifestations, in the form of a fossil genre, whose practice has been preserved for a long time without major changes or variations. Even so, the attractive features of its style have greatly influenced subsequent musical genres such as the Cuban *son* and many others of its modalities.

The origin of rumba

The *rumba de cajón* or *rumba de solar* seems to have originated during a long and gradual process from certain precedent elements of style, among which have been pointed out, because of the similarity of some of its features, those from the Yuka drums feasts, of Congo origin. These feasts or "rumbas" are a perfect example of how certain genres emerged into the public light, that were cultivated for centuries in the reserved space of the barracks of slaves and the so-called Cabildos de Nación (where the slaves were allowed to practice their customs and cultural expressions), until the time that they could manifest themselves more freely and interact with elements of the Hispanic culture, particularly after the abolition of slavery in 1886.

The Yuka drum feasts (toques) share with the *rumba de solar* certain characteristics such as the dance movements that imitated the sexual courtship, which have been described by Argeliers Leon as follows: "The Yuka drums used to accompany a dance also called Yuka, performed by two separate dancers, one in front of the other, dancing in short steps like brief stomps, while alternating the tip and the heel of their feet. The man chasing the woman, this one eluding him, until he could carry out a pelvic strike which was repeated several times by both of them while continuing the dance, a gesture of the same type of the *vacunao* of the *rumba*." ¹⁴⁷ This style of sexual requirement and the pelvic strike of the *vacunao* can be seen in a similar way in the modern *guaguancó*.

¹⁴⁶ Ortiz, Fernando: 1986, p. 9

¹⁴⁷ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 67.

Also, as in the modern *rumba*, the Yuka ensemble consisted of three drums made of rustic logs (called in size order: *caja*, *mula* and *cachimbo*) with patches of ox hide nailed to the body of the drum, and they used, as is currently used in the *rumba de solar*, the percussion with two sticks over a bored piece of bamboo called *guagua* or *catá*, or directly over the drum box.¹⁴⁸

Differently from the modern rumba songs, where Spanish language is preferably utilized, with brief inclusions of texts in African language, the chants of Yuka mainly use the Bantu language, a characteristic that suggests that this style belongs to an early stage in the evolutionary process of the *rumba*.

Rumba and Abakuá

As we already mentioned, we are able to notice certain similarities between the Congo genre of Yuka drumming and the *rumba de solar* that may constitute an indication of precedence and kinship, but between the *rumba* and the cultural tradition of the Carabali slaves in Cuba we certainly find obvious and profound analogies.

The slaves that came from the region of Calabar in South-Eastern Nigeria were called *Carabali* (carabalíes) and began to arrive in Cuba since the 16th century, among many other slaves coming from different tribes and regions that were known in Cuba as *gangás*, *congos*, *congos-reales*, *mandingas*, *lucumíes* and *brícamos*.¹⁴⁹

According to the oral tradition, "...Close to the year 1800, a group of *carabalíes brícamos* were transported to Cuba from the Efí territory that belonged to Calabar which were represented by a king called Efík Ebúton. With him also arrived a prince from the Efó territory called Anameruto Ápapa Efó and nine other sages. All of them belonged to the same Abakuá religion, but represented different tribes."¹⁵⁰

The Carabali, similarly to other groups of slaves, formed societies called *cabildos* or *grupos de nación* (nation groups) upon their arrival, with the purpose of preserving their religion and cultural traditions. Those *cabildos* were authorized at a later time by the Spanish masters, and their members were allowed to gather together and celebrate the "Three Kings' Day" by publicly showing their music, their dances and traditional attire.

Through those celebrations the *carabalí* slaves unveiled the exterior aspect of their culture, but they always kept in the deepest secret all the details pertaining to their

¹⁴⁸ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 67.

¹⁴⁹ Miller, Ivor L.: *Voice of the leopard*, University Press of Mississippi/Jackson, 2009, p. 38

¹⁵⁰ Miller, Ivor L.: 2009, p. 38.

Abakuá religion, which they originally practiced under the guidance of the previously mentioned king Efík Ebúton. They preserved the original name of their first lodge: Ápapa Efó and, according to the tradition, limited the participation in it just to the firsts African members and waited for twenty years before allowing the acceptance of new creole members.¹⁵¹

Within a period of only thirty seven years, between 1840 and 1877, thirteen lodges were founded between Havana and Matanzas; just precisely in the geographical area where at a later time the *rumba de solar* raised to the public light.

According to Ivor Miller, "...the emergence of the Abakuá coincides with the expansion of Havana toward the neighborhoods outside the walls...",¹⁵² among whom those which were built around the port and shipyards possessed particular importance. "The port of Havana had the largest labor force in the city, where since 1763 the ships were loaded and unloaded by teams of free blacks who had served in the *bataillones de pardos y morenos* (battalions of mulattoes and blacks) of Havana... Many of the militiamen in the port of Havana were *carabalí*, and some of them came to be foremen who owned capital and properties... there were intimate, although hidden, ties between the Abakuá societies, the leadership of the *carabalí cabildos*, the militias of color, the foremen of the harbor and the black proprietors..."¹⁵³

The so-called *black curros* also occupied an important place in the development of the Abakuá societies as well as of the *rumba*, so closely related to the emergence of the *Cuban guaracha* during the 18th century. In accordance with the writer José Victoriano Betancourt they wore their teeth filed in sharp points in the *carabalí* fashion. *Black curros* arrived from Spain on an unspecified date and settled in an area adjacent to the shipyards called the Mangrove Swamp (El Manglar), which later became part of the neighborhood of Jesús María, an important center for the town councils called *cabildos de nación* and later on also of great activity for the Abakuá society.

As Ivor Miller says: "...there is documentary evidence that they [the *black curros*] participated in the formation of the Abakuá societies ..." ¹⁵⁴ "The dances of Yuka that were performed during the meetings of the town councils (*cabildos de nación*) in Havana and Matanzas [ca. 1870] were within the area of action of the *carabalí cabildos* and the emerging Abakuá, all of whom contributed to [the evolution of] the *rumba*. Among the most notable *rumberos* of Matanzas were some members of the *carabalí cabildos* that were organizers of the first Abakuá lodge of Matanzas. During the development of *rumba* in the next century, many of its most important cultivators were members of the Abakuá society. The dance of Yuka and its derivative, the *rumba yambú*,

¹⁵¹ Miller, Ivor L.: 2009, p. 40.

¹⁵² Miller, Ivor L.: 2009, p. 89.

¹⁵³ Miller, Ivor L.: 2009, p. 79.

¹⁵⁴ Miller, Ivor L.: 2009, p. 79.

both considered as aspects of the traditions Bantu-Congo, were also interpreted by the Carabalí and the Abakuá, while the *rumba* emerged as a creole manifestation in which the musicians of any nation could participate."¹⁵⁵

As we mentioned before, the similarity between many constitutive elements of the Abakuá rituals and the *rumba de solar* is ample and evident, so we can assume that the Carabalí culture exerted a great influence on the nascent genre.

In addition to certain general characteristics that corresponded to other styles of African music, such as the antiphonal structure of “question and answer” in the voices, the form in which the three drums of the ensemble are executed, and the appearance of one or two idiophones that accentuate the *temporary line*, such as the *catá* and the *claves*, it is also possible to appreciate other characteristics more specifically related to the Abakuá ritual.

Especially, the style of the *rumba columbia* shows the greatest resemblance with the mentioned ritual. According to Donald Brooks Truly: "... this one [the *columbia*] possesses a flavor that is more African than Cuban, principally because its rhythm appears in compound time [the ternary pulse is predominant ... and in some occasions the basic parts of the binary pulse are executed simultaneously with the parts of the ternary pulse (hemiola)]¹⁵⁶ ... its text is African and not Hispanic, and the principal drummer interacts in its improvisation with the soloist dancer ..."¹⁵⁷

Perhaps the most prominent of these features is the interaction between the dancer and the *quinto* drum in the *rumba columbia*, very similar to the one between the *bonkó* and the *Íreme* or *Diablito* in the Abakuá ritual. In an improvisatory way, the performers of the *quinto* and the *bonkó* respectively exert a clear influence in the movements of the dancers, and at the same time also react to these movements. In the *columbia*, the dancer performs a very strong and acrobatic representation, imitating various movements that are taken from real life, such as from cyclists, cane cutters and baseball players, but he also performs many of the characteristic movements of the *Íreme* Abakuá.¹⁵⁸

In the *guaguancó*, a specific element of its “vocabulary” consists of the “obiapá” (or “one beat” drum of the *biankomekó* ensemble) rhythm, that is taken from the Abakuá

¹⁵⁵ Miller, Ivor L.: 2009, p. 159.

¹⁵⁶ Peñalosa, David: 2012, p. 190.

¹⁵⁷ Brooks Truly, Donald: The Afro-Cuban Abakuá: *Rhythmic origins to modern applications*. University of Miami, Open access dissertations, Miami, Florida, 2009. p. 60.
http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations. Retrieved May 25, 2015.

¹⁵⁸ Brooks Truly, Donald: 2009. p. 60. http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations. Retrieved May 25, 2015.

tradition. If we observe in detail this rhythmic pattern, and compare it to the *guaguancó* “salidor” drum rhythmic pattern, we notice that they are very similar.¹⁵⁹

From proto-son to son

We have previously mentioned that due to the analogies and similarities that exist between the peasant *rumbitas* (*rumbitas campesinas*) and the genre that was going to be called *Cuban son*, those (the peasant *rumbitas*) have been classified by Danilo Orozco as *proto-sones* or *primeval soncitos*. The rural *rumbitas* show, although on a partial or embryonic form, the structural characteristics that would later define the *son*; that is to say, the use of the *montuno*, the rhythmic counterpoint that is established between different layers of the musical texture, such as the *guajeo* of the *tres*, the *Time-Line* assigned to the *claves*, the rhythm of the guitar, the bongó and the double bass, the responsorial style of the soloist and the choir, and the new timbres that were gradually incorporated to the instrumental group.

According to Radameés Giro: ...“In its origins the son was comprised of a refrain (estribillo) that, in the chanting of the *tresero* (*tres* player), was reiterated during an undetermined number of measures; the dancers gathered around the performer, that was the central figure of the dance, to hear him song *sones*.”¹⁶⁰

The following quote from Miguel Matamoros (1894-1971), one of the most famous soneros of all times, offers us a description of the *son* in its most early stage, when its form was still limited to the repetition of a single motive called *montuno*. In this regard Ned Sublette says: “Matamoros as a boy played *sones* and *danzones* on the harmonica to entertain workers at the local cigar factory. In an interview he recalled the *sones* of his boyhood:

The Chispa de Oro (The Golden Spark) was a society on San Antonio Street, where they only danced *sones*. The *sones* that they used to compose in those days were nothing more than two or three words and they spent the whole night repeating them, like that son that goes: Caimán, caimán, caimán, ¿donde está el caiman? (Crocodile, crocodile, crocodile, where is the crocodile?). Or that other one, ‘La pisé, la pisé, la pisé, mama, con el pié, con el pié, con el pié, na’má. (I stepped on it, I stepped on it, I stepped on it, mamá, with my foot, with my foot, with my foot, that’s all).’¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Brooks Truly, Donald: 2009. p. 58-59-60. http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations. Retrieved: May 25, 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Giro, Radamés: 1998, p. 198.

¹⁶¹ Sublette, Ned: *Cuba and its music*. Chicago Review Press, Inc., 2004. P. 367.

According to Radamés Giro: "...a *regina* (name that was given to the quatrain) was attached after the refrain (estribillo). The structure *refrain-quatrain-refrain* appeared in the *son* at a very early stage, as we can find in one the most ancient *sones* that have been known, *Son de máquina*, which is comprised of three *reginas* with their correspondent refrains [Figure 29]."¹⁶²



Fig. 29 – Son de máquina.¹⁶³

In the CD *Integral Anthology of son* (Antología Integral del son), an investigative work of Danilo Orozco on the Valera-Miranda family in the region of Guantánamo, a version of the *nengón*, a predecessor genre of the *changüi* from Guantánamo, has been collected; it shows the traditional form of refrain-quatrain-refrain which, in this case, by its constantly varied repetition becomes a real *montuno*. The sung text is as follows:

I was born for you nengón, I was born for you nengón... [bis] (Yo he nacido para ti nengón, yo he nacido para ti nengón... [bis])

Guantánamo sixteen (Guantánamo Dieciséis)

colony of my hope (colonia de mi esperanza)

do not distrust me (no me tengas desconfianza)

that I am within the law (que estoy dentro de la ley)

I was born for you nengón, I was born for you nengón... [bis] (Yo he nacido para ti nengón, yo he nacido para ti nengón... [bis])

The *nengón* is a precursor *proto-son* of the Guantánamo *changüi* and of the subsequent Santiago *son*. It is characterized by the constant alternation of improvised verses between a soloist and a choir. Some traditional instruments utilized in the *nengón* are the *tres*, the *guitar*, the *güiro* and the *tingotalango* or *tumbandera*.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Giro, Radamés: 1998, p. 199.

¹⁶³ "Carusito" Hernández, Florencio: Son de máquina, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXwOMmn1ZTQ>, Retrieved: June 18, 2015.

¹⁶⁴ Griffin, Jon: Cuban Music Styles. <http://salsablanca.com/ethnomusicology/cuban-music-styles/>, Retrieved: May 28, 2015.

According to Danilo Orozco: “The *changüi* is a genre of song, dance and versification which is typical of the Guantánamo Bay region and surrounding areas. It shares important characteristics with the *complex* of the *son* in regard to certain rhythms, instruments and the presence of choral refrains. At the same time, it exhibits certain original elements of its own... his style of performance is completely contrary to the standards of the *son*. The part of the *bongo* in the *changüi* is based on the continuous support of one or two beats (executed close to the edge), together with other two hits executed in the center of the drumhead patch, as well as many other fragmentary and contrasting rhythms inserted into the music. At a predetermined time, the distribution of beats forms a series of rapid and pointed patterns known as *picao*. They are occasionally grouped in combination with strong or softer accents. "This type of rhythmic patterns also possess common elements with the *rumba* style, of Bantu origin... the *tres* simultaneously performs a number of melodic-rhythmic figures that, without abandoning the basic rhythmic pattern, initiates peculiar repetitions and variations in relation to the *bongo* part.”¹⁶⁵

Also in primeval *sones* from *Isla de Pinos* such as the *sucu-sucu*, on the opposite end of the island, we find the same structure of *quatrain – refrain* than in the Eastern *proto-sones*. According to María Teresa Linares, in the *sucu-sucu*: "...the music is similar in its form, melodic structure, instruments and harmony to a *son montuno*. A soloist alternates with a choir singing a passage, accompanied by a group. The soloist sings improvisations on a quatrain or a *décima*. The instrumental ensemble begins an introduction in which the instruments gradually integrate starting from the *tres*. "This introduction of eight bars is followed by the choir that alternates with the soloist several times.”¹⁶⁶

The son, from Oriente or from Havana?

One of the most firmly established opinions within the oral and written traditions of the Cuban people is the one stating that the *son* emerges in the Oriental region of the Island, but in fact there isn't any reliable documentary evidence about its birthplace. The only information that has come to us on that topic is comprised of the oral testimonies of some informants; and we know how often these testimonies turn out to be very deceitful and contradictory. With regard to the beliefs on the origin of the *son* we can say the same as David Peñalosa in reference to the *rumba de solar*, that they are full of “unknown facts, contradictions, conjectures and myths.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Orozco, Danilo: *The influence of family traditions in Cuban music*, Cuba in Washington. Smithsonian Folkways, 1997, p. 8.

¹⁶⁶ Linares, María Teresa: *El sucu-sucu en Isla de Pinos*, Academia de Ciencias de Cuba, La Habana, 1970.

¹⁶⁷ Peñalosa, David: *Rumba Quinto*. Redway, CA, Bembe Books, 2011(xxii) [ISBN 1-4537-1313-1](#)

Since its emergence into the public light in the Havana of the 1920s, the Cuban *son* has always been involved in a lengthy dispute that is still far from ending. Since its inception, the *son* groups used to utilize names associated with their geographic origin, such as the *Oriental Quartet* (Cuarteto Oriental) and the *Havana Sextet* (Sexteto Habanero), in a constant struggle of public relations trying to firmly establish the most desired "denomination of origin". Also in the texts of the *son* melodies we can find frequent mentions to this subject, such as; *My Oriental son* (Mi son oriental), and the well-known theme *They are from the mountain but sing in the plain* (Son de la loma, y cantan en llano), in a discreet allusion to the mountainous region of Eastern Cuba.

To a more sophisticated and intellectual level belong the musicological texts from Alejo Carpentier, who wrote in his book *La música en Cuba*: "By the year 1920, Havana was invaded by the *son*. Its lyrics spoke about Manzanillo and Palma Soriano, praising small homelands located in the mother soil:

Son from Oriente, (Son de Oriente,)
my hot son, (mi son caliente,)
my son from Oriente (mi son de Oriente)"

Carpentier locates the source of the *son* nothing less than in the 16th century, when he says: "The *son* was an extraordinary novelty for the *habaneros* (Havanese). But it was not of recent invention, as is to be assumed. Since the time of the Má Teodora was known as a genre of danceable song in the province of Santiago..."¹⁶⁸

Emilio Grenet adheres, just as Carpentier, to the theory of the Eastern origin when he tells us: "The *son* breaks into the capital around the year 1917, to impose a fashion which seizes the enthusiasm of our dancers and discusses its supremacy to the *danzón*. The atmosphere was saturated with the perfume of the wild East..." and also includes the controversial detail of the Má Teodora: "despite its relatively recent relevance, it is attributed to the *son* an antiquity that reaches up to the dawn of our musical history, because Má Teodora, sister of Micaela Ginés, our '*viguelista* (*vihuela* player) from the years 1568 to 1592,' sang those popular rhythms accompanied by her *bandola* (a Spanish plucked string instrument) in Baracoa, which is, according to Sánchez de Fuentes, the birthplace of the Eastern (Oriental) *son*."¹⁶⁹

Cristóbal Díaz Ayala subscribes to the Orientalist theory and also the Má Teodora theory in his book *Cuban Music, from the areíto to the new trova* (Música Cubana, del areíto a la nueva trova) published in 1981 when he says: "And the *son* was old, it was already in the notes of the Má Teodora from the XVII century [sic]; it lived and

¹⁶⁸ Carpentier, Alejo: 1979, p. 192.

¹⁶⁹ Grenet, Emilio: *Música Cubana. Orientaciones para su conocimiento y estudio*. Panorama de la música popular cubana. Editorial Letras Cubanas, La Habana, Cuba, 1998, p. 82.

proliferated in Oriente but racial and local prejudices delayed its consecration in Havana.”¹⁷⁰

But already in 1994, when he published his important work entitled “Catalogue of the Cuban music” (*Discografía de la Música Cubana*), Ayala corrected the previous information saying about the *son*: “For a long time it was given an ancient origin, in the 16th century, based on the book of Laureano Fuentes Matóns “The arts in Santiago de Cuba”, published in 1893.” “In 1971, researcher Alberto Muguercia proved the fallacy of this theory with solid arguments, and him as well as other researchers, [such] as Danilo Orozco, set the origin of the *son* in the mountainous area of the Sierra Maestra, in the province of Oriente, by the second half or the end of the 20th century.” But at the same time Ayala exposes another controversial theory supported only by oral traditions, that of the introduction of the *son* in Havana by members of the *Permanent Army* (*ejército permanente*) in 1909: “the authors seem to agree that the *son* reached Havana in 1909, because when the *Permanent Army* was created by President José Miguel Gómez, one of its objectives was precisely rooting out the soldiers from its point of origin, moving the troops to serve in distant sites...”¹⁷¹

On this matter, and based on more recent studies, Radamés Giro says to us: “One of the most debated – and debatable – aspects of the expansion of the *son* is its “arrival” to Havana. It has been said – many have repeated it – that it was “brought” to the capital city in 1909 by the Permanent Army ... for simplistic it is not possible to accept this affirmation, since: how is it possible that an armed institution, which main function was not the music, could manage to introduce the *son* in Havana? It is not enough to affirm that some musicians were associated to this armed body, many of them soneros. It is not possible to deny the contribution of the Permanent Army to the expansion of the *son*, but this must not take us to the affirmation that it was brought by it to Havana. It is more reasonable to say that the *son* came to the capital through those who were emigrating from its original place to other regions, including the capital city.” “If the *son* is an artistic phenomenon that had been forming since the second half of the 19th century - and not only in the old province of Oriente - it is logical to assume, but not to affirm, that long before 1909 it was already heard in the capital for the reasons previously noted...”¹⁷²

In his important book “About chant and time” (*Del canto y el tiempo*), Argeliers León doesn’t mention the Oriental origin theory when he refers to the *son*, he only states on this subject: “Because of its form, the *son* begins from the alternance of quatrain-refrain” and that “...about this one [the *son*] there are references since the 18th

¹⁷⁰ Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: *Música cubana, del Areyto a la Nueva Trova*, Ediciones Universal, Miami Florida, 1993, p. 114.

¹⁷¹ Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: 1994. P. 317.

¹⁷² Giro, Radamés: *Los Motivos del son*. Panorama de la música popular cubana. Editorial Letras Cubanas, La Habana, Cuba, 1998, p. 200.

century.”¹⁷³ In the same text he points out that the classical or typical sonority of the *son* emerges or “cristalizes” in Havana. According to his own words: “In the capital city, to the *guitar* that accompanied and filled a bass part and the *tres* that followed the singer in a treble part, other instruments were added, thus cristalizing in a type of group of six or seven instruments (sextet or septet): *guitar*, *tres*, *maracas*, *claves* (in the hands of the singer) and the *bongo*; the *marímbula*, the *botija* and a second *guitar* completed the ensemble.”¹⁷⁴

María Teresa Linares shows great discretion when assigning a specific zone to the *son* origin in her book “The music between Cuba and Spain” (La música entre Cuba y España). She only says that: “... the *son* begins to spread out in recordings from groups of Easterners (orientales), grouped with musicians of other places, including the city, in Havana ...” and that: “Maria Teresa Vera, who had begun to sing professionally with Manuel Corona in 1911, and in 1916 had recorded songs with Zequeira, recorded in 1918 with Carlos Godínez (1882-1953) ... Godínez was one of those pioneers that came from the East (Oriente).”¹⁷⁵

In Danilo Orozco, in spite of being a deep researcher about the origins of the *son* in the Eastern region (*son Oriental*) and a great enthusiast and promoter of its Eastern modalities such as the *changüí*, we observe an evolution toward a wider theory of the *son*’s birth that includes other regions of the Island, when he exposes:

The Eastern zones of the island would be favorable for a great part of specific important factors in interactive results; patriarchal relationships, analyzed parental type, strong Bantu presence and others. But some of them –maybe less accentuated- marked also zones of the center and the western end of the country; that is why some of them show signals of similar processes (almost unknown), at least in their transition phases which also explains the *sonero* affinity in those regions even before its complete national projection. Therefore hundreds of eastern territories have a great generative importance – objective but not excluding- and this comprises the early urban-rural relationship.”¹⁷⁶

With respect to what Orozco points out about “specific factors that marked also zones of the center and the western end of the country” we have already mentioned how very ancient manifestations of *rumbitas* and *proto-sones* have been identified in these zones, such as the *sucu-sucu* in Isle of Pines (Isla de Pinos) which because of the association of its texts with the Independence Wars may be chronologically located in the earliest stages of the *son*, during the second half of the 19th century.

¹⁷³ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 113.

¹⁷⁴ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 115.

¹⁷⁵ Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino. 1998: 155.

¹⁷⁶ Orozco, Danilo: 1999, Introducción.

For example, Radamés Giro tells us about manifestations of *proto-sones* in the Matanzas province during a very early period of the 20th century: "In Matanzas *son* was also made, and the famous composer and *tresero* Chicho Ibáñez says that in 1906 he composed his first *montuno* titled *Poor Evaristo*: 'It was a tune with three or four little words that we put together, and at the end we also put a repeated phrase, the *montuno*, for everyboy to sing.' Thus, people responded by chanting [...]' Ibáñez composed in Pedro Betancourt, his birthplace, many of those *montunos*. 'However, in those years the son was called *goat* in Cárdenas. They called it like that because it was like gossips told with a satire [...]. In 1910 was when the real *son* began.'"¹⁷⁷

But maybe the most important argument in favor of a wider and inclusive theory about the son origin would be the identification of some of its most distinctive elements of style in primeval genres which were cultivated in the city of Havana since the 19th century.

Argeliers León says with respect to "a series of *rumbas*, to which is attributed great antiquity (they are called 'rumbas from the Spanish times') "...of this kind must have been the dances about which the chroniclers of the last century left some names without describing the context of the chanting, dancing, instruments and environment by whom they were produced, limiting themselves to place them among the lower classes, in the foundling homes (*casas de cuna*), or between the rabble (*gentualla*)." To this respect we have mentioned dances (some have already being refered to in previous chapters), such as the *tumbantonio*, the snake (*culebra*), the chin-chín, the kite (*papalote*). Allusions to these dances were collected in many *guarachas* and lent their names to *sones* and *danzas* which incorporated passages from their melodies."¹⁷⁸

In the previous paragraph, León mentions the melodies of some danceable songs, *rumbitas* or *primeval soncitos* which appear in certain *danzas* and *contradances* from the end of the 19th century that have been studied in detail by the American musicologist Peter Manuel in his book *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean*, where he says: "...the links between the contradanza and vernacular songs were direct. First, contradanza composers borrowed liberally from popular songs of the day, such that compositions as "Cambujá" may have been stylized imitations of guarachas, rumbitas or other aforementioned ephemeral entities enigmatically mentioned in 19th century sources [such as the *karinga* (o *caringa*), the *siguemepollo*, the *tumbantonio*, the *chin-chín*, the *culebra*, the *atajaprímo*, the *bolanchera*, the *cariaco*, the *papalote*, the *juangrandé* and the *toro*]"¹⁷⁹. A Cuban chronicler noted in 1852 that musicians composed *danzas* 'using common ditties, and even street vendors calls and songs of negros.'¹⁸⁰ ... In Havana such

¹⁷⁷ Giro, Radamés: 1998, p. 201.

¹⁷⁸ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 143.

¹⁷⁹ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 24.

refrains might be sung by dancers any time a new figure began... It is entirely conceivable, for example, that Coca wrote such a piece as Cambujá with the intention and expectation that the dancers and other enthusiasts may merrily sing along with its tuneful *montuno*...¹⁸¹ “Some contradanza scores even indicated the text snippet to be sung. For example, the score of Coca’s “Chi chí pi pí ni ní” indicates how those nonsense words are to be set to catch phrases of the B section [Figure 30].”

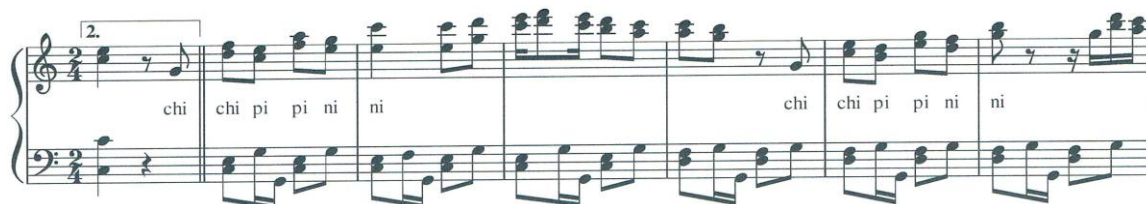


Fig. 30 – Fragment of the contradanza Chi chí pi pí ni ní, from Lino Coca.

According to Peter Manuel: "...in the handful of pieces composed between 1850-1860s, whose B sections consist primarily of repeated, ostinato-like two-bar in which a syncopated, *tresillo* – or *cinquillo* – based measure alternates (in either order) with one in even notes." ...and concludes Manuel: "These passages constitute remarkable precursors of the composite ostinatos, called *montunos*, that form the basis of the second part of the son emerging in the early twentieth century and of the salsa that derived from it in the 1960s-70s. Contradanzas displaying this feature include “El dedo de Landaluze” by Ruiz (1862), “Cambujá” and “¡Ave Maria Gallo!” by Lino Coca (ca. 1857) [Figure 31], “Suelta el peso” by Juan de Dios Alfonso, “Suelta el cuero” (perhaps by the same author), “La expedición de Marruecos” by “P.B.C.” (1860), y la Santa Taé de Antonio Boza (1852). All these composers were based in Havana, with the exception of Boza, who was from Santiago de Cuba.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ García de Arboleya, José: *Manual de la Isla de Cuba: Compendio de su historia, geografía, estadística y administración*. Habana, Imprenta del Tiempo, 1958, p. 263 – 264.

¹⁸¹ Manuel, Peter: *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean*. Temple University Press. Philadelphia, 2009, p.76.

¹⁸² Manuel, Peter: 2009, p. 73.



Fig. 31 – Fragment from the Contradance *Ave María Gallo* in which a measure with notes of equal duration alternates with another measure based on the syncopated rhythm of the *cinquillo cubano*.

Manuel also states that the combination of measures where “a ciquillo or tresillo (sometimes in slightly altered form) alternates with a bar of more or less even eight notes; this pattern strongly suggests and was possibly accompanied by the clave pattern that came to pervade the rumba and son as documented from the early twentieth century, with the tresillo itself falling on the “three” side of the clave beat”¹⁸³ [Figure 32].

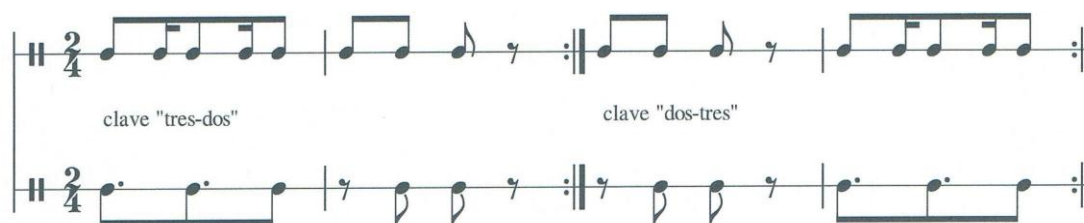


Fig. 32 – Rhythmic pattern of the contradance compared to the three-two and 2-3 clave rhythm.

Natalio Galán suggests that these final sections with an *ostinato* character may have been repeated with indefinite improvised variations: “The bi-partite form of the contradance became theme and variations in the *cedazo* that closed it as a figure. To fill-in the time that prolonged it, the Cuban Dance depended upon the imagination of its musicians to settle in the 36 measures or more...”¹⁸⁴

Galán also points out how the final improvisation was carried out based on some chords in a way that was very similar to a *montuno*, referring to the contradance *El dedo de Landaluze* from Tomás Ruiz in which also the repetitions appear indicated on the score: “A definition of jazz that may be picked-up at a corner of Bourbon Street may fit in that description of the 1800s dance. The permutations of the *Creole* acting upon what was fixed by a tradition of formulas... Don Tomás Ruiz published in *Don Junípero*

¹⁸³ Manuel, Peter: 2009, p.73.

¹⁸⁴ Galán, Natalio: *Cuban y sus sonos*, Pre-Textos, Artegraf S.A., Madrid, España, 1997, p. 150.

(1862) of Havana a contradance: *EL dedo de Landaluze*, where it is determined how such improvisation came up in the *cedazo*. Measures 18 and 19, as well as 26 and 27, were marked by repetition signs which, located in the *cedazo* section (measures 17 to 32), are an open door to improvisation, thus destroying the basic figures of the *contradanza* and pointing toward a *danza* that may have extended itself in an *ad libitum* that was not fixed in the score until that moment, but was maybe indicated in the guidelines for the performers...¹⁸⁵ [Figure 33]



Fig. 33 – Fragment of the contradance *El dedo de Landaluze* showing repetition marks in the final section.

Peter Manuel points out that the contradance *La Santa Taé*, composed in Santiago de Cuba, shows the same characteristics that have been mentioned in reference to other contradances, with its four measures *ostinato* based on the 2-3 clave rhythm that suggests a *montuno* section, and he concludes by saying: “The relative simultaneity of all these pieces indicates a remarkable homogeneity of style in Santiago and Havana...”¹⁸⁶ These contradanzas with thorough-composed A sections and *montuno*-type B sections, their distinctively syncopated bass patterns, their implicit clave structures, and their *primo-segundo* treble voicings, constitute remarkable precursors to the *son*, which is generally regarded by musicologists as having evolved from the input of musicians and distinctive musical forms from rural Oriente in the early 1900s. As such, the existence of this Havana contradanzas calls for a revision of conventional Cuban music history (along with Carpentier’s notion that the creole contradanza came from Oriente and that the *cinquillo* was absent in Havana salon music until the late 1870s). Insofar as they illustrate that most of the distinctive musical features of the *son* were already present in Havana in the 1850s, they suggest that whatever form of *son* was brought from Oriente would have constituted at most of a repertoire of refrains (*estribillos*, as in the simple *nengón* and *kiribá* format) and a syncopated *tres* style with characteristic eight-note anticipations, coupled with the use of the bongo...”¹⁸⁷ And Manuel concludes with the following remark: “As such, the roots of the *son* are best sought not in the hills of Oriente but in the contradanza salons of Santiago and Havana.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Galán, Natalio: 1997, p. 166-167.

¹⁸⁶ Manuel, Peter: 2009, p.75.

¹⁸⁷ Manuel, Peter: 2009, p.75-76.

¹⁸⁸ Manuel, Peter: 2009, p.77.

But, furthermore, it is possible that some essential elements of *son* would likely have already existed in Havana long before 1850, because in a score of the Havaneese *guaracha* *El Sungambelo*, published in 1813, we may be able to observe some characteristics that would suggest the existence of a section very similar to a *montuno*. Between measures 25 to 33 of the mentioned *guaracha*, we find a refrain with the following text: *Sungambelo de mi vida, ven a aliviar mi fatiga; Sungambelo de mi amor, ven a aliviar mi dolor*, which shows several characteristics that anticipates those of the *montuno sonero*, such as the antiphonal structure that the text suggests:

Soloist: Sungambelo de mi vida
 Choir: ven a aliviar mi fatiga
 Soloist: Sungambelo de mi amor
 Choir: ven a aliviar mi dolor

In the piano accompaniment we can also clearly observe the rhythmic pattern of the *Cuban claves* (distribution of 2-3 pulses) [Figure 34], which Peter Manuel also mentions in reference to some *contradanzas* from mid-19th century, which seems to imply that its utilization was already spread within the practice of popular music. We should consider that the appearance of this peculiar rhythm has usually been located at a much later time, during the second half of the 19th century, and has been related to the emergence of the *rural* and the *urban rumba*. Due to the common structural simplicity of the popular music scores at that time, the refrain was printed just one time, but as we have already mentioned before, it is quite possible that it would be repeated several times and also sung along by the audience.

The image displays a musical score for the *guaracha* "El Sungambelo". It is organized into two systems, each with three staves: Voice (Voz), Piano (Piano/Pno.), and Rhythm (Ritmo de clave). The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 2/4. The first system (measures 1-5) includes a first ending bracket over the first measure of the vocal line. The lyrics for the first system are: "bai le Sun gam be lo de mi vi da ven a_a li viar mi fa ti ga Sun gam". The second system (measures 6-10) begins with a measure rest in the vocal line. The lyrics for the second system are: "be lo de mi_a mor ven a_a li viar mi do lor". The piano accompaniment consists of chords and single notes in both hands. The rhythm part shows the characteristic clave pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes.

Fig. 34 – Fragment of the *guaracha* El Sungambelo.

Rumba, guaracha and son

In reference to the denominations that have been assigned to all the different genres or modalities that emerge through the evolution of the *son* we find ourselves in a similar situation as the one we face in relation to the *guaracha* and the *rumba*; that is to say, the utilization of the same term to name two or more different genres, or the use of diverse denominations to designate only one genre. Of course, it is obvious that this practice tends to generate great confusion and disconcert among those who study the popular Cuban music as a subject.

The ideal scenario for the analytical study of the different forms and styles that integrate the evolutive process of a musical genre, such as the Cuban *son*, would imply the possibility to assign a specific denomination to each individual genre, with the purpose of identifying it with respect to other musical structures with different

characteristics, which in turn will receive different denominations. But unfortunately, this is not the case in regard to the study of the origin and development of the *son*.

Within the evolutive process of the *son* we can identify several stages without much effort. A first one, in which its form is limited to the modified repetition of the same phrase or refrain called *montuno* (from the mount or countryside) because of its peasant origin, where the voice is usually accompanied by just a few musical instruments, perhaps one or two, that may be: a cordophone such as the *guitar* or *tres* and an idiophone as the *güiro* or the *claves*. A second stage, more complex, in which its formal structure includes a *copla* or quatrain (called *regina* in the eastern regions of Cuba) in addition to the *montuno*, and where the instrumentation is expanded to include other instruments such as the *tumbandera*, the *botija* and the *marímbula*; and a third stage characterized by a more professional and sophisticated development of each section, as well as larger instrumental groups comprised of six or seven instruments, which included characteristic timbres such as the *bongo*, the *claves*, the double bass and the trumpet. In this third stage we arrive at a structure and sonority of the *son* that may be called *classical*; however the evolution of this genre doesn't conclude at this point but continues until our present time, thus generating new and attractive modalities (such as the *mambo*, the *timba* and the *songo*).

In a general sense we can associate those stages with certain denominations that have already been mentioned, such as the *rumbitas campesinas* (the Caringa, the Papalote, Doña Joaquina, Anda Pepe and the Tingotalango), which structure corresponds with the classification of the first evolutive stage; the *proto-sones* or *primeval soncitos* which have been related to the characteristics of the second stage and, in some occasions like in those of the *changüi* and the *sucu-sucu*, belong to such a high stage of musical development that may be considered true *modalities* or *variant styles* of the *classical havanese son* (son clásico habanero), undisputed representative of the third evolutive stage of the genre.

As it has been mentioned before, we frequently find diverse denominations for the same genre in different stages of its development, and in the great majority of cases, due to the lack of documentation, it is impossible to identify to which stage each denomination belongs. This situation is perfectly illustrated by the following testimony provided by Mongo Rives: "It has been told that the rhythm [*sucu-sucu*] emerged during the 19th century with the theme *Campana*, from an unknown author. At that time it was called *rumba* or *rumbita*; at a later time it was called *dancita* and after that, in 1910 it was called *cotunto*, because the *fiestas pineras* (feasts from Isle of Pines) extended through the night until dawn and at that particular time you can hear this bird from the countryside [called *cotunto*], and it was baptized in this way because of the theme *Compay Cotunto*. Back in colonial times the Americans asked what was that sound they heard that was produced by the feet while dancing; then the *pineros*, as a joke, decided to call that sound and rhythm *sucu-suco* [or *sucu-sucu*]." ¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Leyva Morales, Ramón: Entrevista a Mongo Rives, El Rey del Sucu-suco,

Also the *changüí* from Guantánamo, considered as a *son* modality, shows an evolution process with respect to its denomination which is similar to that of the *sucu-sucu*. Radamés Giro comments on this subject: "...Born in the region of Guantánamo, old province of Oriente, the *changüí* was called *tunante*, *Maracaibo*, *capetillo* and finally *changüí*..."¹⁹⁰

Due to the lack of proper written documentation, we do not think is possible to determine when the new genre characterized by the *montuno* repetition began to be called *son*, but everything seems to indicate that was not in an early stage of its evolution, but rather, during the period of its *consolidation* or *crystallization* in the Havana of the 1920s. If we observe the examples that we have mentioned from the process of evolution that began with the appearance of the *rumbitas campesinas*, we can confirm that the word *son* is not mentioned but on those that already belong to the period of the Havanese sextets and septets.

As an example of what we have previously exposed let us recall a quote from Radamés Giro in which he manifests: "Chicho Ibáñez affirms that in 1906 he composed his first montuno titled Poor Evaristo (Pobre Evaristo): 'It was a *tonada* (tune) with three or four little words that we put together, and at the end we also put a repeated phrase, the *montuno*, for everyboy to sing.'" Thus, people responded by chanting [...]' Ibáñez composed in Pedro Betancourt, his birthplace, many of those *montunos*. 'However, in those years the son was called *goat* in Cárdenas. They called it like that because it was like gossips told with a satire [...]. In 1910 was when the real *son* began."¹⁹¹

It is possible that we have gotten accustomed to locate the emergence of the *son* at a much earlier time than the one that really corresponds to this historical event; maybe due to a hypothesis proposed by Argeliers León to this respect, where he locates the beginning of its evolution during the 18th century,¹⁹² and in which he classifies as *sones* all the premival genres that participated in the creation of the *son's classical style* at the beginning of the 20th century. León also includes in the general category of *the son* (lo son) other similar styles that emerge in the Caribbean area, which are also part of a generic family that belong to what he denominates as: the *Caribbean phenomenon of the son* (lo son)... that encounters his highest level of development in Cuba."¹⁹³

<http://carapachibey.blogspot.com/2013/12/carpachibey-con-el-rey-del-sucu-suco.html>. Consultado: Mayo 24, 2015.

¹⁹⁰ Giro, Radamés: 1998, p. 201.

¹⁹¹ Ver: p.80

¹⁹² León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 113.

¹⁹³ León, Argeliers: 1981, p. 116.

By locating the origin of son in the 18th century, León is implicitly including in that classification some genres such as the *Cuban guaracha* and the original *peasant rumbitas* (rumbitas campesinas), which only coincided in very few elements with the classical *son*, and he is as well including in the wider concept of *the son* (lo son) some Caribbean genres so dissimilar as the Dominican *calenda*, the *chuchumbé* and the *bamba* from Veracruz, the Colombian *cumbia* and *porro*, the *round dance* from Jamaica and Caiman Islands, the Panamanian *tamborito*, the *sucu-sucu* from Isle of Pines, the *changüí* in the Oriente province and the *plena* in Puerto Rico. Though however, when limiting the concept of *the son* (lo son) to the Caribbean area, León leaves outside of this classification some genres that are very similar to those mentioned, such as: the *choro*, the *maxixe* and the *samba* in Brasil, the *milonga* in Argentina, and the *candombe* in Uruguay.

Although it is true that the *son*, in its classical form popularized by the trios, sextets and septets from the 1920s in Havana, is the product of an evolutive process that possesses a direct relationship with the first *creole* modifications of the Hispanic pattern of *quatrain-refrain* (copla-estribillo), we think that designating the term *sones* to certain primeval genres, such as the *guaracha* and the *rumbitas campesinas*, is truly like applying to the aforementioned evolutive process a teleological finality that would place the *son* or *the son* (lo son) as the inevitable and obvious final destiny of this process. This may be like stating that the first performers that introduced African rhythms in the European song structural pattern during the 18th century, had already as their main purpose to compose *sones*; as well as deducting that the development of certain Cuban popular genres, from the *guaracha* to the *timba* and *songo* is part of the evolution of just a single genre, the *son*.

In fact, what is properly called *son* is just the peculiar structure that this genre possessed in a specific stage of the long process that includes a consecutive series of modalities or generic types, which emerge due to the gradual transformation of a structural pattern that we prefer to call the *rumba prototype* (prototipo de la rumba) because of its more general and inclusive character, that has been previously defined as: the result of a process of cultural fusion, in which were combined certain European components such as the lyrics, the tonal relationships (Major-Minor), the melodic and harmonic structures, and the quatrain-refrain (copla-estribillo) form, with syncopated rhythmic patterns and micro-metric fluctuations (micro time) of African origin.”¹⁹⁴

As we have previously analyzed, the Cuban *guaracha*, that emerges in Havana at the beginning of the 20th century, was called indistinctively *rumba* or *guaracha*, as it occurred in the vernacular theater, about which María Teresa Linares said: “Some recordings of *guarachas* and *rumbas* have been preserved that are not different between them in the guitar parts – when it was a small group, duo or trio, or by the theater

¹⁹⁴ Ver: p. 53-54.

orchestra or a piano. The labels of the recordings stated: *dialogue and rumba* (diálogo y rumba).¹⁹⁵

During the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, it is possible to find documents where those *rumbas* and *guarachas* were mentioned, but we cannot find any written commentary or mention about the *son*. According to an important investigative work about the Cuban music recordings, compiled and catalogued by Cristóbal Díaz Ayala, the word *son* appears for the first time in a catalog with the purpose of denominating a musical genre in 1917 [Pare motorista-*son* santiaguero], and it is related to the recording of four pieces by the Oriental Quartet (Cuarteto Oriental).¹⁹⁶

The compilation of recordings from María Teresa Vera and Rafael Zequeira, produced between 1916 and 1924,¹⁹⁷ constitute a perfect example of how the *son* sounded like before it was performed by a sextet or septet, just accompanied by a guitar, and in some occasion also by a Cuban *clave*.

With regard to the *rumbas* and *guarachas* that appear in that compilation, we have already mentioned that they practically didn't differ between them in any of its structural characteristics; and as for the *sones*, that of Manuel Corona called *Palma Soriano*, recorded in 1923, possesses a traditional quatrain-refrain form that is not different by any means from that of a *dance* or a *rumba*. Only the *son* called *Cintura de alambre* (Waist of wire), from 1920, which includes the accompaniment of a *bongo*, possesses the characteristic form of the *classical son*; a first section in a slower tempo and a faster *montuno*, repeated several times at the end of the song.

Cintura de alambre (Waist of wire) appears in a catalog of the Columbia Records from 1921, which clearly shows the close relationship that existed between those denominations, and therefore also between the formal structures and genres called *rumba* (accompanied by the guitar at the *teatro vernáculo*) and the *son*. About this catalog from Columbia Records Díaz Ayala says: "apparently, already by 1921 the *son* was starting to attract some attention, and Columbia, in the catalog released that year scheduled to appear in April, includes a page devoted exclusively to what they call "Sones Santiagueros" (*sones* from Santiago de Cuba) obviously to differentiate them from the *sones* recorded for the Victor [Record Company] by the Sexteto Habanero. What is truly included in that list are the recordings of the *Cuarteto Oriental* and other recordings of *trovadores* such as Maria Teresa, Zequeira, Floro and Miguel, as well as artists of the Alhambra Theater etc., recordings originally released with the label of *rumba*, and that now because of commercial convenience would become *sones*... [Figura 34]"¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Ver: p. 50.

¹⁹⁶ Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: 1994. P. 324.

¹⁹⁷ Vera, María Teresa y Zequeira, Rafael: *Grabaciones Históricas – 1916-1924*, Notas de María Teresa Linares, Tumbao Cuban Classics 1998. D.L.B. 11870, 1998, CD.

¹⁹⁸ Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: 1994. P. 324.

The easy way in which the transfer between the generic classifications of *rumba* and *son* was carried on in this case, induces us to suppose that in certain stage of its evolution, the *son* structure was very similar, or maybe identical on occasions, to that of the *rumba* (and also therefore, as we have already analyzed, to that of the *guaracha*).

Gathering in Havana

As we have mentioned before, the way in which supposedly the *son* “arrives” to Havana has been for a long time cause of controversy and speculation. According to some experts on this subject such as Jesús Blanco, the *son* was brought to the capital by certain members of the Permanent Army (Ejército Permanente) in 1909,¹⁹⁹ but considering other documental evidences, it is quite probable that it may have been present in that city since the 19th century.

Let us remember the reflexions of Peter Manuel with respect to the analysis of some Havanese contradances from mid-19th century that showed certain formal characteristics, such as the modified repetition of a refrain, which apparently constituted an ancestor of the *montuno*. In reference to this subject Manuel concludes: “...As such, the roots of the *son* are best sought not in the hills of Oriente but in the contradanza salons of Santiago and Havana.”²⁰⁰

For the same reason that the structural elements of the “*rumba* prototype” (prototipo de la *rumba*) are transported to the rural areas and emerge during the mid-nineteenth century in the *peasant rumbitas* (*rumbitas campesinas*) throughout the island, the features of that new style pass again at a later time to the urban areas, since those regions stayed always in constant and active economic, social and cultural communication. As Radames Giro affirms: “If the *son* is an artistic phenomenon that had been developing since the second half of the 19th century - and not only in the former province of Oriente - , it is logical to assume, but not to assert, that it was heard in the capital much before 1909...”²⁰¹

Along with the slaves, recently liberated after 1886, that established their homes in the slums of the capital city, also arrived workers from the inland of the country and some adjacent rural zones looking for an improvement in their living conditions; many of them brought their African-style *rumbas* and others came with their *peasant rumbitas*, their *reginas* and their *montunos*.

¹⁹⁹ Blanco, Jesús: *80 años del son y soneros en el Caribe*. Fondo editorial Tropicós, Caracas, Venezuela, 1992.

²⁰⁰ Ver: p. 83.

²⁰¹ Giro, Radamés: 1998, p. 200.

It was in Havana where the gathering of those styles that were developing separately during the second half of the 19th century, the *rural rumba* and the *urban rumba*, took place. In the slums of Havana, the *guaracheros* and *rumberos* that sung accompanied with the *guitar* and *güiro* got acquainted with other *rumberos* that sung and danced to the sound of the *cajón* and the *clave*; and the result of that encounter was the fusion of both styles in a new genre that was going to be called *son*.

According to Ned Sublette, some singers that began to arrive in Havana during the first decade of the 20th century were not yet called *trovadores* (troubadours).²⁰² Those *cantadores* (chanters), as they were initially called, accompanied themselves with the guitar and their repertoire was composed mainly by Cuban songs and the recently created bolero, but also by *guarachas* and *rumbas*.

The trovadores arrived mostly from *Oriente*, where the oral tradition locates the origin of this musical movement which foundation has been attributed to the *Santiaguero* (from Santiago de Cuba) Pepe Sánchez, about whom it is also said that was the creator of the first bolero titled “Tristezas”; they belonged to the most diverse social levels and categories, from the refined and cultured Pepe Sánchez, a professional tailor, owner of copper mines and representative of a fabrics enterprise located in Kingston, Jamaica, to the humble and talented Sindo Garay.

A friend and disciple of Pepe Sánchez, in 1894 Sindo Garay became a member of a circus troupe that was on its way to Haiti, and from there he went to Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) where he met José Martí in the town of Dajabón. In 1900 he went back to Santiago de Cuba, where he continued with his circus-related activities and he had five children with his Dominican wife. After a casual short trip to Havana in 1903, he returned to this city in 1906, and as Ned Sublette tells us: “He spent his days and nights in the bohemian lifestyle of the cantador, wandering through town, sitting in a park to play for passersby, serenading for a peso at a party, entertaining brothel girls and customers with his guitar in the waiting room, strolling through the numerous cafés in La Habana Vieja. And making records, which was not high-paying work either.”²⁰³

According to Díaz Ayala, it is possible that the news about Sindo Garay recording for the Edison Company in Havana attracted many other trovadores that began arriving to the city, such as Alberto Villalón and Rosendo Ruiz from Santiago de Cuba, as well as Manuel Corona from Caibarién, Las Villas.

Differently from their original home towns, Havana offered the *trovadores* the opportunity to make a living, although precariously just with their artistic activity; sharing time between the outdoor performances at the cafés and restaurants, providing

²⁰² Sublette, Ned: 2004, p. 297.

²⁰³ Sublette, Ned: 2004, p. 299.

back-ground music for the Alhambra Theater, as well as recording for different companies.²⁰⁴

Those *trovadores* got together with the ones that were already living in Havana, like Maria Teresa Vera and Rafael Zequeira, in order to create a movement that was going to result in a real transformation of Cuban music. They also collaborated with other musicians that were mainly dedicated to cultivating the *rumba* and the emerging *son*, with the purpose of establishing the first *sonero* groups in the capital city.

A partial list of *trovadores* that recorded *rumbas*, *guarachas* and *sones* in Havana at the beginning of the 20th century were: Sindo Garay, Manuel Corona, María Teresa Vera, Alberto Villalón, José Castillo, Juan Cruz, Juan de la Cruz, Nano León, Román Martínez, as well as the duos of Floro and Zorrilla, Pablito and Luna, Zalazar and Oriche, and also Adolfo Colombo, who was not a *trovador* but a prominent actor and singer at the Teatro Alhambra.²⁰⁵

In accordance to Ned Sublette: “In the barrios of Havana, the groups played with whatever lineups they could muster. The *son* developed for a decade or so in the hands of semi-professional groups, some of them taking a form similar to the *coros de clave y guaguancó*,...”²⁰⁶ *Coros de clave* were choral groups, which repertoire was comprised of songs accompanied by the Havanese *clave*, that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century in the zones adjacent to the Port of Havana, and spread at a later time through the city of Havana as well as throughout Matanzas, Cárdenas and Sancti Spíritus.²⁰⁷

One of those semi-professional groups, Los Apaches, was invited by President Mario Menocal to play a party at the Vedado Tennis Club in 1916, and that same year some members of the group reorganized themselves in the so called Oriental Quartet (Cuarteto Oriental),²⁰⁸ they were the *Santiaguero* Ricardo Martínez, leader and *tres*, Gerardo Martínez, first voice and *claves*, Guillermo Castillo, *botijuela* and Felipe Neri Cabrera, *maracas*. According to Jesús Blanco, quoted by Díaz Ayala, few months after created, the *bongosero* Joaquín Velazco was incorporated to the group.²⁰⁹

In 1917, the Cuarteto Oriental produced the first recording of a *son* that was documented in the catalog of the Columbia Records Co., which was entered as: *Stop motorist- Santiaguero son* (Pare motorista-son santiaguero). In the list of performers

²⁰⁴ Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: 1994, p. 238.

²⁰⁵ Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: 1994, p. 249-273.

²⁰⁶ Sublette, Ned: 2004, p. 335.

²⁰⁷ Orovio, Helio: 2004, p. 54.

²⁰⁸ Sublette, Ned: 2004, p. 335.

²⁰⁹ Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: 1994, p. 318.

surprisingly appears a fifth member of the group, a *tresero* called Carlos Godínez, who was a member of the Permanent Army (ejército permanente).

In 1918, The RCA Victor hires Carlos Godínez to organize a “typical group” and record some songs. That recording was made in February, 1918, at the Hotel Inglaterra in Prado and San Rafael, and the group, that was called *Sexteto Habanero Godínez*, included the following members: Carlos Godínez, leader and tres, María Teresa Vera, first voice and clave, Manuel Corona, second voice and guitar, “*Sinsonte*”, third voice and maracas, Alfredo Boloña, bongo, and another unknown performer that was not included in the list.²¹⁰

In 1920, the *Cuarteto Oriental* was restructured to become a sextet; it was named as *Sexteto Habanero*, and established the *son* sextet configuration that was comprised since then by: tres, guitar, bongo, claves, maracas and double bass.²¹¹ The members of this sextet were: Guillermo Castillo, leader, guitar and second voice, Gerardo Martínez, first voice, Felipe Neri Cabrera, maracas and choir, Ricardo Martínez, tres, Joaquín Velazco, bongo, and Antonio Bacallao, botija. Abelardo Barroso, one of the most famous Cuban soneros of all times, joined the group in 1925.²¹²

According to María Teresa Linares: The Sexteto Habanero was able, with the participatioin of one *oriental* and five *habaneros*, to establish the *sonero* group where each instrument while preserving their own hierarchy, including the voice, offered in a musical event the sum of a sonority that served as a pattern for other groups... the exemplar mastery of each of its members truly established a school...²¹³

It would be impossible not to mention the *Trío Matamoros* from Santiago de Cuba, one of the most successful *son* groups ever. The *Trío Matamoros* constitutes a perfect example of the trajectory that the *trovadores* followed until they became *soneros*. Its founder, Miguel Matamoros (voice and first guitar), was born on May 8th, 1894 in Santiago de Cuba, where he participated in the traditional trova movement. In 1912 he offered his first public presentation in the Teatro Heredia in Santiago de Cuba and in 1925 he joined Siro Rodríguez (voice and maracas) and Rafael Cueto (voice and second guitar) to form the famous Trio that bore his name.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: 1994, p. 319.

²¹¹ Sublette, Ned: 2004, p. 336.

²¹² Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: 1993, p. 116.

²¹³ Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino: 1998, p. 160.

²¹⁴ Orovio, Helio: 2004, p. 135.

In their style we appreciate a synthesis of the stylistic elements that are present in the sextets and septets. The diverse rhythm layers that are typical of the *son* were distributed in this case between the two guitars and the *maracas* of Siro, which played the typical pattern of two semiquavers and an eighth note that always coincides with the accents of the measure, which, in other instrumental groups is assigned to the *güiro*, to a metallic *guayo* or to a common *machete*.

Rafael Cueto plucked the guitar strings instead of strumming them as it was commonly done, thus contributing to the rhythmic configurations of the *guajeo* in the treble level and to the syncopated patterns of the *tumbao* in the bass level. Surely, the rhythmic counterpoint was completed by the strumming of the first guitar, executed by Miguel. The trio was accustomed to occasionally include other instruments like the bongo in its recordings, and finally, in accordance with Maria Teresa Linares: "... they decided to extend the trio to become a group of danceable *sones*. They added a piano, more guitars, *tres* and voices. In these new propositions [of instrumental formats] Lorenzo Hierrezuelo, Francisco Repilado "Compay Segundo" and Beny Moré took part."²¹⁵

In 1928, the Trio travels to New York with a contrat from the RCA, and its first record caused an immediate impact in the national and international audience, which raises the group to an unprecedented level of fame that will not end until their official farewell presentation in 1960.²¹⁶

The arrival of Ignacio Piñeiro at the *son* universe represents a milestone in the evolution of the genre, since his incorporation led to a real process of symbiosis between the style of the *rumberos* and the *soneros* of Havana. Piñeiro was born in the neighborhood of Jesús María in 1888, and to earn his daily sustenance he performed multiple manual tasks, such as cooper, foundry worker, journeyman on the docks, cigar roller and bricklayer. But more than in anything else, he excelled as a member of a group of *clave* and *guaguancó* called *The golden bell* (El timbre de oro), for which he performed as a soloist [called *decimista*], and later joined the choral group *Los Roncos* from *Pueblo Nuevo*. According to Andrés Flores, an Abakuá informant whose testimony appears in the book *Voice of the Leopard* from Ivor Miller: "...the composer of the group *Los Roncos* of Pueblo Nuevo was Ignacio Piñeiro, member of the Efóri Enkomon [Abakuá lodge]. Ignacio Piñeiro was one of the most beloved and respected persons in the neighborhood of Pueblo Nuevo. He had a very sharp voice and was tremendous when we began to sing with the chorus of *Los Roncos*... He also composed and arranged many Abakuá chants for the choirs of *clave* and *rumba*, as well as the *son* septets."²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino: 1998, p. 167.

²¹⁶ Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: 1993, p. 116.

²¹⁷ Miller, Ivor L.: *Voice of the leopard*, University Press of Mississippi/Jackson, 2009, p. 160.

Among the songs recorded by María Teresa Vera and Rafael Zequeira between 1916 and 1924, we can find a *clave* song composed by Ignacio Piñeiro in 1923, titled *The chants of the Abakuá* (Los cantares del Abakuá), in which the words in Éfik language are abundant, and where the *clave* repeats a typical *time-line* in 6/8, in the style of the ancient African chants.

In 1926, Piñeiro founds the *Sexteto Occidente* together with María Teresa Vera, who taught him to play the double bass, and with whom he travels to New York in order to record for the Columbia Records. Upon his arrival in Cuba in 1927, he founded the *Septeto Nacional* (called this way because its members came from all over the nation)²¹⁸ as leader and double bassist, along with Abelardo Barroso, *guide of the choir voice* and *claves*, Juan de la Cruz, tenor, Bienvenido León, baritone and maracas, Alberto Villalón, guitar, Francisco Solares, *tres*, and “El Chino” Inciarte, bongo. At a later time in 1929, they added a trumpet, Lázaro Herrera,²¹⁹ from which Radamés Giro has said: “With the arrival of the trumpet player Lázaro Herrera to the septet, the search process for a *son* sonority was completed by Piñeiro. Because of the way he played the instrument Herrera became a model for posterior performers.”²²⁰

It would be enough to compare the recordings of María Teresa Vera and Zequeira, from 1916 to 1924, with those of the *Sexteto Nacional* to realize how important was the influence exerted by the *urban rumba* on the *son* style. There is no precise evidence about the exact moment when the *clave* and the *bongo* were incorporated to the *sonero* group (although according to the existing evidence it is quite probable that it was in Havana) but in the *Septeto Nacional* we already see the instruments from European origin such as the *guitar*, the *tres* and the *double bass* sharing hand to hand with those of African origin, the *clave* and the *bongo*, which contributed essential elements from the *rumba*, such as the *time-line* of the *clave* that supports the rhythm in the treble level, and the rhythmic improvisation of the bongo, very similar to that of the *quinto* drum of the *rumba*.

About the inclusion of African rhythms María Teresa Linares says: “Although it is not mentioned in the first groups that recorded *son*, the *bongo* was incorporated fundamentally to that genre, but it was known also in the *clave* groups or choirs, and the *parrandas*. It is incorporated into groups that expanded the trio or quartet, where they only had string instruments, *guitar*, *tres* and even *bandurria*... The beats of the *bongo* introduced a percussive layer, in which the African precedent is represented by expressive elements that were present in the ritual and festive *toques*, most of all in those instruments that played the *oral-parlance* rhythm that in the antecedent drums is located in the bass level, and in the *son* the *bongo*, and in the *rumba* the *quinto*, passed to the treble level...”²²¹ Agustín Gutiérrez, famous *bongosero* that played in several important

²¹⁸ Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino: 1998, p. 165.

²¹⁹ Díaz Ayala, Cristóbal: 1994, p. 117.

²²⁰ Giro, Radamés: 1998, p. 204.

²²¹ Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino: 1998, p. 151.

groups – such as the Sexteto Habanero and the Sexteto Nacional - was an integral *bongosero*. He played marvelously the *quinto* in the *columbia*; he participated in ancient Abakuá groups and other ritual groups of African antecedent...”²²²

Something similar happened with the *claves*, about which María Teresa Linares comments: “The *claves*, according to testimonies of old age *soneros* were incorporated in Havana, were they were already known as utilized by the *clave* choirs (*coros de clave*) and in the *boleros* sung by the *trovadores*,”²²³

According to Radamés Giro: “Piñeiro also gave certain independence to the singer, that soon became a soloist within the group with his own personality. At the beginning was Abelardo Barroso; and after him Carlos Embale.” The contribution of Carlos Embale perhaps constitute one of the best examples of the fusion of the *urban rumba* and the *rural rumba*, due to the fact that he was one of the most prominent vocalists of the *rumba* groups as well as of the *son* groups of his time. Born in Havana in 1923, his characteristic nasal and vibrant timbre defined the vocal style of various *son* groups and other ensembles, such as the Septeto Boloña, the Septeto Bolero, the Orquesta Fantasía of Neno González, as well as the Conjunto Matamoros and the Septeto Nacional; but Embale also constituted an important referent in regard to the style of *rumbero* groups such as the famous Muñequitos de Matanzas, the Coro Folklórico and the *guaguancó* ensemble that bore his name.²²⁴

The fusion of European and African elements of style that occurred in the *son* is perhaps the most comprehensive in the history of Cuban popular music, and without any doubt the *son* is the autochthonous genre that has exerted the greatest posterior influence in our own music as well as abroad. Its evolution transcends the age of the sextets and septets and extends in a long evolutive process that has not yet come to an end.

During the 1940s, Arsenio Rodríguez revitalized the *son* style, adding to his group two trumpets, piano and the tumbadoras, another essential element of the Cuban *rumba*. At a later time, already in the 1950s, the *rumba prototype* was applied to the large orchestral formats of the American Jazz Band style, in the *Mambo* of Dámaso Pérez Prado and the *Orquesta Gigante* of Beny Moré.

Most recently, during the 1960s and 1970s, the *son* acquired great relevance through a style that was commercially launched with the name of *salsa* by instrumental ensembles such as the Fania All Stars from New York, as well as by the *rock* with a latin flavor of Carlos Santana and his group.

²²² Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino: 1998, p. 152.

²²³ Linares, María Teresa y Núñez, Faustino: 1998, p. 152.

²²⁴ Orovio, Helio: 2004, p. 73.

In Cuba, the son has been present since the 1960s in the musical production of groups like *Son 14* of Adalberto Alvarez, and *Sierra Maestra* of Juan de Marcos, among other ensembles and soloists, and in such different styles as those of the *nueva trova*, the *timba*, the *songo*, and the “Buena Vista Social Club” project. Most recently, the *son* elements also emerged in styles such as the Cuban *salsa* and the *reggaetón* as well as in a fusion with the *hip-hop* called *guapanga*. We cannot certainly predict what will be the future of the *rumba prototype* in Cuba, but we are most likely far from its decadence and disappearance.

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